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**Is Explaining Faith Enough?
How Might The Language Of 'Everyday' Theologies Challenge Current Approaches**

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**Is Explaining Faith Enough?
How Might The Language Of 'Everyday'
Theologies Challenge Current Approaches
To Adult Religious Learning In Church of
England Parishes?**

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**King's College, London
Department of Theology and Religious Studies**

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submitted for the degree of
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*“For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed;
nor is anything secret, except to come to light.”*

Mark 4:22

Abstract

Understanding learning is critical for churches as it is crucial to how people discover more about faith. Published courses aimed at newcomers and lapsed/sporadic churchgoers dominate learning in the Church of England. These courses adopt a pedagogy of direct learning (transmitting information from teacher to learner, sometimes uncritically) with content which explains the 'basics' of faith. They are a part of the Church's priority to reverse the ongoing decline in attendance. This research argues that direct learning is insufficient because it fails to appreciate the complexity of learning within parishes. It assesses how 'everyday' theologies (theologies that move from experience, context, and practice towards understanding of God and faith tradition) might play an essential role in parish-based learning. First, it establishes four key principles of adult learning by considering the work of John Hull, Jeff Astley, Denham Grierson, and Robert Grainger. Second, it places the current position of the Church of England in perspective by exploring relevant aspects of its history since 1945. Third, it analyses reports and papers submitted to General Synod concerning the *Renewal and Reform* programme of transformation that are related to learning. Fourth, it brings the current situation into a dialogue with everyday theologies. This correlation leads to the conclusion that an understanding of everyday theologies could make a substantial contribution to learning practice in the Church of England by valuing the latent theological voices that are unexpressed by individuals and hidden within the history and practices of local parishes and communities. The Church's current focus on increasing attendance through methods of intentional evangelism which champion the direct explanation of an over-simplified faith, however, means that it might move in the opposite direction. Moreover, the evangelistic focus advocated by *Renewal and Reform* is built on insubstantial theological foundations. *Renewal and Reform* risks moving the Church's ecclesiology in a sectarian direction as it explains its message to a society from which it is increasingly alienated. This thesis calls for the Church of England to reject the attitude to learning that is centred on the direct explanation of Christian basics and evangelism in favour of one which works alongside individuals and communities and enables them to explore fully and creatively the place of God in their lives.

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Introduction

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to explore the Church of England's current understanding of religious learning in its parishes, discuss its effectiveness in practice, and consider if there is a more fruitful perspective. It will consider the historical background to the present situation of lay religious learning in the Church of England. This will be brought into dialogue with 'everyday' theologies (defined below), evaluating their impact on religious learning. The hypothesis to be explored is that the insights of everyday theologies should be taken seriously and integrated into the Church of England's religious learning practice. If this holds true, the Church needs to avoid a pedagogy that revolves around *explaining*, in which the Church as teacher acts on the learner who passively absorbs information. Valuing everyday theologies challenges this perspective because they require the learner to be an active participant. The thesis will consider whether the Church of England provides a suitable environment in which learning that follows the ideals of everyday theologies can take place.

Religious learning is a broad subject which incorporates areas from childhood learning in Sunday Schools and in the home to formation for ordained ministry. The focus of this thesis is restricted to the religious learning of adults within Church of England parishes. Adults have been preferred to children because everyday theologies stress context and experience. These have shaped the attitudes and opinions of adults over a much longer time than children. 'Learning' is preferred to 'education'. Learning is the act of an individual on a developmental trajectory whereas education is often understood to be the act of an institution enforcing a pre-defined curriculum. Learning is also stipulated as 'religious' because it is chiefly related to faith, often has the objective of introducing or deepening Christian belief, and usually takes place in the surroundings of a Church community.

Key Terms

Two key terms require definition. First, 'everyday theologies' is the author's own term for a group of theological approaches whose nature is primarily anthropological. Their starting point for understanding God and faith is grounded in human existence and experience. Everyday theologies share the idea that personal and communal experiences influence ways in which individuals and local church communities make meaningful connections with their faith and how they put it into practice. They value the exploration of these experiences and how they guide the reception and interpretation of Christian tradition. Consequently, everyday theologies stress the importance of the individual, context, and practice and value them as rich theological resources that complement the equally rich resources of Christian tradition.

Examples of everyday theologies include Ordinary Theology, which is the theology of individuals who have received little, if any, formal theological education (Astley, 2002:56). Understanding is moulded by an individual's experiences. A further example is contextual theology which brings together experience of the present (found in personal/communal experience, contemporary culture, and social location) with experience of the past (contained in scripture, theology, and tradition) (Bevans, 2002:7). Everyday theologies also identify with two of the four voices of theology used in Theological Action Research (Cameron et al, 2010:53-55). The espoused voice is how a group articulates its own beliefs and the operant voice is how a group's beliefs are expressed within its practices. Standing alongside the more explicit voices of belief expressed in liturgy, scripture, and official teaching (normative voice) and in academic theological dialogue (formal voice), the operant and espoused voices tend to be more implicit and both need to be carefully drawn out (Astley and Francis, 2013:4-6).

The second key term is 'direct learning'. The author's own term, it is influenced by Freire's concept of 'banking' learning in which students are seen as empty depositories to be filled with information from their teacher (Freire, 1993:52ff). Freire considers this to be oppressive and authoritarian because the teacher is

full of powerful knowledge whilst the students are ignorant. Freire contrasts this with 'problem-posing' education which values the contribution of the students, who are encouraged to reflect on their own position and experience of the world and sees the role of the teacher as one who promotes dialogue and is open to learning herself (ibid:61ff).

There is risk of creating too strong a dichotomy between the experiential-contextual approach of everyday theologies and the oppressive extreme of direct learning posed by Freire's 'banking' model of education. There is a more positive aspect to direct learning. Both Hull and Astley recognise the need for Christianity to pass on its teaching and traditions to further generations but stress that this needs to be done in a critically balanced way. Hull's concept of re-ideologization encourages people to be critical by stepping out of their ideological circles, engaging with other ideologies, addressing areas of tension, and recognising the evolution of their own ideology (Hull, 1985:63ff). He contrasts this to communication within an enclosed ideology in which theology suffers from inertia and is intolerant to challenge and novelty. Astley emphasises the relationship between *formative* education, in which the learner is led to conform to a particular model, and *critical* education, in which the learner undertakes systematic inquiry (Astley, 1992, 1994, and 2015). The formative process of passing on the stories and traditions of faith should be complemented by a critical attitude emerging from the learners' own outlook (Astley, 2015:6).

In this thesis 'direct learning' is understood as a method of teaching in which information is passed from teacher to student and is a necessary attribute of the ongoing communication of faith. It is treated with suspicion, however, because it risks becoming overly authoritative if not balanced by suitable criticism.

Methodology

The methodology of this thesis is based on critical correlation. There are many different forms of critical correlation but their common premise is that they bring practice into conversation with theology and tradition (Tracy, 1975; Graham, 1996; Graham et al, 2005a and b). Sources from the secular world can be

introduced into the conversation to broaden perspective. Critical correlation aims to generate new understanding arising from the correlation which might challenge and transform practice. Don Browning, an American practical theologian, advocated a 'practice-theory-practice' approach (Browning, 1991). He argued that practical theology describes a practice in order to uncover the theory behind it and the questions that it raises. These are brought into dialogue with Church tradition, theology, and contemporary culture, deepening understanding of practice and leading to change. Evelyn and James Whitehead, consultants in ministry education and pastoral theology, propose a three-step correlative process of theological reflection: *Attending*, *Assertion*, and *Pastoral Response* (Whitehead and Whitehead, 1995:6). In *Attending*, all relevant information on an area of concern is collected, including personal experience, Christian tradition, and resources from culture and society. In *Assertion*, these perspectives are gathered in a 'lively dialogue' with the area of concern. In *Pastoral Response*, the insights of the dialogue are brought to bear on the area of concern so that decisions can be made about action in the future.

This thesis will follow a similar pattern. It will create a thick description of the present situation of adult religious learning in the Church of England by considering current practice and the most influential historical aspects. In doing so, it will identify the theology that lies behind it and the questions that it raises. The main theory that will be introduced into the discussion will be that of everyday theologies. This will be explored alongside its implications for adult religious learning. The central dialogue will be between the practice of current learning and everyday theologies. The insights will help to explore the effectiveness of adult religious learning and how it might benefit from change in the future.

Whilst the arguments articulated in this thesis are supported by academic sources, they are also grounded in reflection on my position as an ordained minister in the Church of England and beforehand as a committed churchgoer. This leads to some criticism of current Church of England strategy which is occasionally polemical. This is justified because of the professional nature of this research which is based on experience.

Origins Of The Thesis

This thesis is the result of a long-term interest in learning within Church of England parishes. I have been a practising member of the Church of England since childhood and have experienced many examples of its efforts to educate, ranging from Sunday School and confirmation preparation to university missions and parish courses. As a priest, I have experienced formation for ordination and have led examples of the kinds of teaching I received before ordination. Two personal experiences illustrate how this interest arose and the questions that they provoked.

First, for several years there was a well-known man who practised evangelism in London streets. His catchphrase, incessantly bellowed through a megaphone, was 'everyone's a sinner but with Jesus you're a winner. Be a winner not a sinner'. Evicted from his prime Oxford Street site by means of an ASBO, he moved to Hammersmith Broadway near to the office where I worked. His catchphrase could be heard through the double glazing and I regularly walked past him on the way to the High Street. Most people reacted by walking past and ignoring him. Some would laugh, whilst others would occasionally remonstrate with him about the disturbance he was causing. Although it may have happened, I never saw anyone engaging with him about faith. Reflecting on this 'megaphone evangelism', I was struck that no matter how loud his message was shouted, passers-by paid scant attention to it. The man was seen to be an irritant and was dismissed as evidently mentally unwell. If anything, the megaphone message had the opposite effect to that which was intended. The catchphrase itself might have been memorable but it was also meaningless. It failed to connect with those to whom it was directed. The empty message was hollered ceaselessly in the vain hope that someone would receive it and turn to Christ. Witnessing the megaphone evangelist raised important questions about a Church which stood increasingly on the margins of society and was seeking new ways to understand itself amongst rapid changes in culture and attitudes towards religion. The megaphone message might be compared to an 'explaining' approach in which the aim is for the message to be heard uncritically and whose importance lies in its communication. To what extent was the Church of England engaging in its

own variation of megaphone evangelism, proclaiming a one-way message to those on the outside of its communities but failing to find meaningful connection with its audience? Were people walking past church buildings seeing them as centres of belief and practice that were largely irrelevant to their lives and whose leaders and members said things that were at best hollow and at worst irritating? Such questions invoked a conviction that the Church of England needed to engage with people more effectively by developing educational programmes that allowed them to explore faith more deeply.

Second, I facilitated a group of teenage confirmation candidates in the Parish of Putney. As part of their preparation, they participated in 'The Rough Guide to Christianity', a course which consisted of talks on aspects of Christianity given by the Vicar followed by discussion in small groups. Reflecting on God's identity through Moses' request on Mount Sinai that God should show him his glory (Exodus 33), I encouraged the group to draw their own images of God. The drawings varied immensely. The most common depiction was of God as an old, white-haired and bearded man, wearing robes and sandals and standing on a cloud. Others showed God in different ways. There were further anthropomorphic interpretations (including God on a skateboard) as well as several abstract drawings consisting of indistinct, coloured shapes. Each member explained their interpretation and the group discussed the depictions together. This provoked an extensive discussion about the nature of God. It revolved around questions including the extent to which God has a form and whether this should be human, the preference of the Church to identify God with male pronouns, and the boundary between how much of God is known and how much remains mysterious. With only their experience of Sunday School and religious education, the group used their own language to discuss significant theology. The discussion reached no firm conclusions but challenged understandings of God and broadened the group's perspective. Such an involved discussion might not have taken place had I chosen to present the Church's own understanding of God. This led me to question the value of a 'facts-based' approach to learning as opposed to one that allows people to share and explore their own thoughts. The participants' own understandings of God rather than formal doctrine were the starting point for this rich conversation.

Learning And Faith

These experiences stimulated my thought about learning in the Church. Learning is vital for faith. As people learn about faith and adopt its practices, so it continues from one generation to another. Faith is learned from others and the learner must decide for themselves whether or not to commit to faith. If the Church of England wishes to cultivate high quality learning amongst the laity, it is essential to understand how learning take place, in particular the differentiation between learning *in* faith and learning *about* faith and the central relationship between 'formative' and 'critical' learning.

Learning *in* faith occurs mainly through socialization and enculturation (Westerhoff, 2012; Foster, 2012). Usually associated with children, those who are brought up in practising Christian families implicitly learn about the stories, values and goals of faith. It is not only the family unit that is important. Participating in the religious practices, rites of passage and social activities, and sharing the common vision of the wider church community is equally important to religious formation. The faith community shares in the nurture of belief. Living within the structures of faith for a significant time is essential to learning and it is for this reason that learning through socialization/enculturation is linked to raising children. Learning is a consequence of long-term involvement in the life of a church. Learning *about* faith is linked to a religious education curriculum, often found within schools, within which people learn about the key practices and beliefs of faith. This is explicit learning whose primary objective is to ensure that learners become better informed. It does not necessarily carry the expectation that it will lead to conversion and lifelong faithfulness. It is possible to learn about Christianity without ever visiting a church or experiencing worship. Objective knowledge of faith neither equates to belief nor does it always involve participation in the life of a Church community.

This suggests that the Church should prioritise learning *in* faith and encourage learning through participation in the life of its communities. A critical issue, however, is that as Christianity becomes less widely practised, so there are fewer Christian families in which socialization can take place. It also requires a

predominantly Christian culture which is increasingly rare in an age of plurality and secularization. Having relied on the socialization-enculturation model to form new generations of Christians, the Church is being compelled to rethink its understanding of learning and to seek other methods to enable people who have had limited contact with one of its parishes to understand and potentially adopt its faith.

The Church still has a need to communicate the content of its message to new generations of believers. The goal of *formative* religious education is passing on the Church's values, beliefs, and practices to others (Astley, 1992; 1994; 2000). Formation is subject-centred learning which aims to shape the learner into the established culture of the Church. It has a vital role to play in transmitting important information to others but requires a degree of compliance amongst learners. Consequently, a danger is that it might lead towards indoctrination. *Critical* education is learner-centred and more concerned with evaluating the Church's tradition than receiving it. It uses experience to critique Church culture. It might be argued that critical learning cannot take place without some formative learning through which the content of the tradition is assimilated. Astley argues for a balance between the formative and the critical, encouraging a dialogical approach between present experience and past tradition in which both inform and transform the other (Astley, 2002:3). Similarly, Groome suggests that the formative aspect of Christian learning concerns *disclosure* rather than *closure* (Groome, 1980:189). He values the place of Christian tradition as a part of an ongoing dialogue which accepts that the story has no single agreed meaning and exists to be critically reflected upon (ibid:194). There is a mutual conversation in which the tradition critiques the present and vice versa (ibid:196).

As the Church revises its understanding of learning in response to changes in culture, there is a risk that it will get distracted from the importance of learning *in* faith and will prioritise teaching people *about* faith, moving its learning model to a primarily formative approach as it attempts to explain itself to those who do not understand. In this case it might become more like the man with the megaphone shouting a disconnected message than a community that welcomes people to participate in its life. The key is to strike a balance between the formative and

critical aspects of learning ensuring that learners and tradition are both open to challenge and transformation.

Academic Development

Questions about religious learning remained important throughout my training for ordination and were stimulated further during my Curacy by involvement in various courses that were offered in the parish, including preparation for confirmation and admission to Holy Communion before confirmation, *Christianity Explored* (Tice, 2011), *Lentwise* (Gooder, 2010), Bible Study groups, and three courses written specifically for the parish. This experience led to further research in a dissertation for an MA in Ministerial Theology, during which I first encountered Astley's concept of 'ordinary theology' (Astley, 2002). Explored in more detail in the next chapter, ordinary theology has been a major influence in my research. Ordinary theology is the theology of those who have received no formal theological training and is formulated primarily through experience. Astley believes that theological training is not a prerequisite for people to articulate their own understanding of faith and that such expressions should be held in high regard by the Church alongside formal doctrine and academic theology. This struck a chord with my experience of the confirmation candidates' discussion about their depictions of God which were expressed in their own language. It also seemed to be a way of avoiding 'megaphone theology' by respecting individual thoughts about God rather than insisting on a singular theological line. Moreover, it suggested that theology should be a joint enterprise between laity, academics and clergy. The dissertation explored clergy understanding of ordinary theology through a series of interviews (Peacock, 2012). The clergy interviewed acknowledged the existence of ordinary theology but were reluctant to let it exert too much influence and saw it as a potential threat to the Church's formal theological position as well as, in some cases, their own role as a parish's 'theological expert'. This raised important questions about the validity of ordinary theology and the extent to which the Church and its ministers were prepared to accept it.

Questions of learning, education and ordinary theology continued to influence my academic trajectory. This led to an empirical study of the effectiveness of a parish course (Peacock, 2015). This assessed the delivery of the *Creeds* module of the Church of England *Pilgrim* course through interviews with the course leader, questionnaires for participants, and analysis of recorded sessions (Cottrell et al, 2015a). It concluded that the course delivery fell short of expectations and indicated some important issues. First, published courses provide an option that parishes can easily implement. Minimum preparation is required in parishes where resource is stretched. Yet this might lead course leaders to follow the material uncritically and to yield to its inherent theology which might not necessarily be suited to the parish's context. The published nature of such courses (and in the case of *Pilgrim*, the sponsorship of the Church of England) imbues them with a perceived theological authority. It should be noted, however, that the practice of these courses is not always uncritical and it is common for leaders to adapt material. Second, by using published courses for ease of implementation, parishes impose them on learners without taking account of their context. Different parishes call for different approaches to learning just as learners within them are motivated to learn for different reasons. The generic nature of published courses means that they can present their own answers and fail to engage with contextual needs and experience. Third, the role of the leader in any course is vital. Published courses can reduce the role of leader to that of a guide and their ease of implementation encourages minimal preparation. In order for the material to be effective, the leader must set the tone of the group and pick up on important points that need further exploration, such as accounts of experience and expressions of ordinary theology. This research suggested that published courses might encourage poor learning practice amongst group leaders.

This research raised five further questions. First, if ordinary theology is important, are there any other theological approaches that similarly value experience and individual interpretation? Second, how prepared is the wider Church of England to accept the importance of ordinary theology and any associated theologies? Third, how might these theological approaches affect the practice of religious learning in the Church of England? Fourth, to what extent are the current

situation in the Church of England and attempts to reform it open to the potential that these theological approaches might bring? Fifth, what might a programme of religious learning that reflects the bias of these theological approaches look like? These questions, along with the hypothesis discussed above, have influenced the shape of this thesis.

Chapter Synopsis

This thesis aims to answer these questions and test the hypothesis. Chapter 1 reviews key literature, focussing on the work of key writers – John Hull, Jeff Astley, Denham Grierson, and Robert Grainger. Each presents a different aspect of adult religious learning and everyday theologies. This chapter examines the theoretical background to this thesis and highlights the challenges that each writer brings. This leads to the proposal of four core principals of adult religious learning.

Chapters 2 and 3 offer a description and analysis of the present situation of adult religious learning in the Church of England and the historical developments that have contributed towards it. Chapter 2 concerns the historical dimension and focuses on influential initiatives and events between 1945 and the enthronement of Justin Welby as Archbishop of Canterbury in 2013. Beginning with a statistical overview of the ongoing decline in church attendance, the chapter considers the 1945 report *Towards The Conversion Of England* which encouraged the Church to focus on evangelism, the evolution of selection and training for ordained ministry, *Faith In The City*, the controversial 1985 report on urban priority areas, the ‘Decade of Evangelism’ in the 1990s, the growth of discipleship courses and process evangelism in the 1990s and early 2000s, and *Mission Shaped Church*, the 2004 report on church planting and growing new congregations.

Chapter 3 examines the present situation in the Church of England, focusing on *Renewal and Reform*, a wide-ranging programme of transformation begun in 2015. It provides an overview of *Renewal and Reform* and evaluates the most relevant General Synod papers up to and including the February 2016 sessions.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of the learning environment suggested by *Renewal and Reform* compared to the four principles of adult religious learning proposed at the end of Chapter 1.

Chapters 1 to 3 create a thick description of the theory behind this thesis and the present situation in the Church of England. Chapter 4 brings these into dialogue and illustrates the key challenges that everyday theologies bring to adult religious learning. It argues that there are three core elements within everyday theologies that have an impact on adult religious learning – context, the individual, and practice. Each of these is described and is brought into conversation with the practice of adult religious learning and the initiatives of *Renewal and Reform*.

The thesis concludes by returning to the five questions and the hypothesis discussed in this Introduction and considers the extent to which they have been addressed. The impact of this research on the Church of England's understanding and practice of adult religious learning and the wider ecclesiological issues that it raises are reviewed. The Conclusion makes recommendations how the Church of England might change its approach to adult religious learning so that it can create a stimulating and creative learning environment.

Chapter 1: Review Of The Literature – Key Themes And Issues

1.1 Introduction

The works of John Hull, Jeff Astley, Denham Grierson and Robert Grainger, offer significant insights into the issues concerning lay adult religious learning in the Church of England.¹ They raise pertinent questions observations and provide the theological and theoretical foundation for this thesis. Hull, Astley and Grainger write out of the Church of England context whilst Grierson writes from his experience of ministry and training in Australia. Hull's hypothesis in *What Prevents Christian Adults From Learning?* is that Christian adults find learning challenging and consequently often fail to progress their understanding of faith beyond a basic level (Hull, 1985). He investigates the background to this

¹ The body of literature relevant to adult religious learning is considerable and many other authors have made a significant contribution but cannot be discussed in full.

From a theological perspective, models of practical theology are significant, particularly contextual theology explored by Schreiter (2015) and Bevans (2002), and methods that seek meaning in practice, including Browning (1991), Heitink (1993) and Cameron et al (2010). Westerhoff (2012) and Foster (2012) explore faith transmission through socialization and enculturation and Fowler (1981) develops the theory that faith evolves alongside the different stages of psychological self-development. Groome (1980) considers how a contextual and practical approach might be brought into a Church learning environment and Wigg-Stevenson (2014) reflects on her empirical research into what happened when learners were encouraged to bring their own opinions into a church course. Processes of theological reflection, especially those based on the pastoral cycle, also inform the attitudes to learning that are discussed (Graham et al, 2005a and 2005b; Green, 2009).

From a more secular perspective, Gadamer's epistemology of the fusion of horizons has been influential (2003). Gadamer's dialectical argument is that meaning is created from the fusion of history and culture with personal experience. Secular approaches to adult education have contributed to the argument. Experience is deemed to be central to adult education by Lindeman (1926), Dewey (1938) and more recently Jarvis (2009, 2010). Freire (1970) describes and criticises the notion of 'banking education' and advocates greater involvement of learners and appreciation of context. In Piaget's theory of constructivism (2001), he argues that children form meaning principally from experience.

hypothesis and outlines its most important contributing factors. In *Ordinary Theology*, Astley highlights the differences between a remote 'academic' theology which is centred in the academy and a more personal 'ordinary' theology which is articulated in the everyday lives and conversations of Christian people (Astley, 2002). He believes that the Church should recognise the value of ordinary theology because it can add an invaluable dimension to theological discourse. In *Transforming A People Of God*, Grierson observes the importance of the beliefs and underlying theologies that are embedded in individual Christian communities (Grierson, 1984). He argues that an effective process of change in any church community should start by identifying and investigating these beliefs. Grainger's *Educating Anglicans* is a critical analysis of how groupwork has been used extensively in the Church of England in recent decades as a tool for parish-based learning (Grainger, 2013). He reflects on the style and effectiveness of learning groups in the most widely-used courses and challenges the status quo through reflection on the current position and empirical research. Each of these writers will now be considered.

1.2 Professor John Hull: *What Prevents Christian Adults From Learning?*

In *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?*, John Hull, former Professor of Religious Education at the University of Birmingham, considers the place of faith in modern society, the identity of ideological communities and their response to the phenomenon of bafflement, and the influence of psychological models of human development (Hull, 1985). Although written over thirty years ago, Hull's insights remain highly relevant.

1.2.1 Faith And Church In A Changing World

According to Hull, several aspects of modern society have sidelined faith. First, the bureaucracy of the modern world has pushed personal belief from the public to the private sphere (ibid:4-10). Servitude to nationality and profession have taken priority over religion. Hull suggests that faith has become a refuge from rather an integral part of society. As society has evolved, faith has become a place of protection from the challenge that this brings. Religious practices evoke

a childhood perception of security. Reflecting on the often-heard comment that 'Christmas is lovely for the children', Hull argues that many adults choose to socialize their children in the Church out of nostalgia for their own childhood rather than belief that Christianity continues to be relevant. Church harks back to a time of simple answers far removed from the complex demands of adult life. Adults want their children to experience the same nostalgic reassurance that they themselves desire. If understanding of faith and Church remains rooted in childhood, learning has failed to progress and links between faith and experience of adult life have not been realised. Church remains for many adults an unchanging and unchallenging haven from modern life.

Second, the rationality of society, in which everything and everyone has a clear place and function, has had an impact on religious belief (ibid:10-13). Whereas religion once provided the very structures through which the world was understood, scientific and technological advances have radically questioned this worldview, challenging and often replacing these structures. Religion has had to choose between rejecting these challenges and becoming detached from the new realities of the world or adapting through a process of 'cognitive bargaining' in which it self-modifies to find a new role in society. Hull uses the example of the Reformation as an example of 'cognitive bargaining' in which the world of increasingly implausible 'magical-religious practices and beliefs' changed faith into 'a form of radical self-understanding issuing in a new kind of religious and ethical consciousness' (1985:11). Whilst religion and modernity have enjoyed a relationship in which each has learnt from the other, Hull believes that the challenges of modernity have seen religion retreat to the safety of the private. As faith has stopped learning from the world around it, so the modern world has stopped recognising its relevance, failing to learn from faith. In a general failure to engage with the modern world, the Church has become increasingly removed from the concerns of society and separated from public consciousness thereby diminishing its relevance to debate in the public arena.

Third, the rise of individualism is a key feature of modernity (ibid:13-19). Modernity values autonomy as opposed to loyalty to tribe, community, family or faith. In a modern society governed by self-determination, people are expected

to make their own career and life choices. This is also reflected in secular education which has become focused on individual development. Hull observes that Rousseau, Kant and the twentieth-century theory of Piaget have placed 'rational autonomy' at the heart of the identity of an educated person. This means that society defines a person by the choices they make rather than the context that moulds them. Hull argues that this growth of individualism is reflected in the religious world. Expression of faith has become a matter of choice, illustrated by the breadth of Christian denominations and traditions within them. There have been two extremes in how churches have responded to individualism, neither of which provides is satisfactory. One extreme is that churches that reject individualism tend to emphasise tradition and authority at the expense of adult learning. Any educational programmes are based primarily in instruction and transmission and eschew critical engagement. At the other extreme, churches that reject authority and tradition are described by Hull as gatherings of people who express their inner, subjective devotion. Their shared sense of identity is tenuous because there is little common belief to hold them together. In an extreme individualistic church, private worship is valued but learning together is discouraged because it might bring challenge to individual belief.

Fourth, modernity focuses on moving into the future whereas faith is primarily rooted in the past (ibid:19-23). Modern society values planning for the future over seeking wisdom in its history. Although religion can act as a catalyst for social change, it naturally prefers nostalgia and conservatism. Hull suggests that this creates a natural tension between modern society and religion. In churches, this loyalty to the past is as likely to be evidenced by a devotion to buildings or relatively recent liturgical traditions as by a commitment to the remote past. As a result, introducing change can often be extremely challenging. Although the past is important, church communities can be so focussed on maintaining it that they fail to engage with the learning opportunities of the present, preventing them from moving into the future. Hull writes:

When an ideology seeks to create a future which will be as much like the past as possible [...] then we may say that the ideology is seeking to destroy the distinction between the past and the future. A Christian

education which is nothing but transmission is destructive of the future as *future*. (ibid:22)

True learning communities seek to understand and respond to the present and the new situations that this brings and in so doing will not become moribund. They will find ways to evolve that are loyal to their past and meaningful for the future.

These factors make a significant contribution to the perceived irrelevance of faith in modern, western culture. The Church is becoming more of an artefact than a living, evolving organisation. Hull believes that the plurality of modern society is the most significant challenge to faith (ibid:24-34). He discusses three understandings of pluralism. First, 'objective' pluralism is how significant developments in mobility and communication have juxtaposed cultures and religions. This has questioned sacred structures that have hitherto left isolated parochial cultures largely unchallenged and has led to a climate of religious tolerance. Contact between religions has made them less plausible as individual bodies of belief. Their authority is undermined, believers are forced to spend more time in defence of their religious world view, and they become fearful of relativity.

Second, Hull discusses 'subjective' pluralism. The nature of modern society means that individuals live in multiple spheres of existence, such as work, home, school, parenthood, sports, hobbies, faith and politics. These spheres are often unrelated and each has its own rules, expectations and morality. Church life becomes just one of these spheres. Individuals can display different behaviours depending on which sphere they inhabit. The lack of connection between these spheres means that individuals can demonstrate dramatically conflicting behaviour and worldviews which they do not perceive to be contradictory. Third, Hull discusses how to overcome this separation. Individuals can operate within different frames of consciousness, such as play and social interaction, which influence their behaviour and perception. Hull suggests that religion should be an all-encompassing frame of consciousness which brings meaning to everything

else. Faith can value rather than reject relatedness by creating links between previously disparate aspects of existence.

Hull, therefore, encourages an awareness of relationships between different aspects of religious life and wider culture and society. Rather than adopting a totalitarian approach to faith that denies plurality and other aspects of modern society, adult religious learners should explore this relatedness and allow their faith to be open to transformation through these encounters. Church-based learning needs to provide an environment in which learners can make these connections between their faith and their many spheres of existence. This can move faith beyond the private sphere and make it a more integral part of people's lives.

1.2.2 Ideological Communities And Bafflement

Hull argues that churches are ideological communities whose identity is grounded in a set of collective beliefs. Church communities often struggle to justify their position in today's society because of the challenges it brings to their ideology. Their response to this challenge is key to their future. Referring to Niebuhr (1960), Hull considers three theological terms – polytheism, henotheism and monotheism (Hull, 1985:36). A *polytheistic* response accepts pluralism uncritically and allows people to have divided loyalties. It lives with multiple centres of power and meaning and individuals could subscribe to many beliefs. These beliefs can be contradictory and any sense of a unifying faith and identity is lost. A polytheistic response ultimately falls short because it cannot provide an all-encompassing frame of consciousness. Losing any sense of distinctiveness, faith merges into the pluralistic background.

A *henotheistic* response is based in tribalism. Those who are henotheistic are unstintingly loyal to a structure of belief and belonging, such as faith, class or nationality. This loyalty isolates the individual from the influence of the outside, of which the believer becomes afraid because of the threat that it poses to the belief system. Henotheism reinforces boundaries between the 'insiders' and 'outsiders' of a tribe. To question these boundaries is to be disloyal to the tribe.

Hull suggests that henotheistic believers are often cautious about learning more about their faith out of fear that it may lead them to question it. Questioning can lead to doubt which might risk exclusion from the tribe. Consequently, 'the Christian believer is here given no alternative to the life of docile, questioning obedience, for the life of the active enquirer would induce guilt and would be blasphemous. To enquire is to doubt, to doubt is to mock' (ibid: 37). Henotheistic communities hold people within a taut framework of belief.

The principal failure of henotheism is that it does not allow believers to engage with cognitive dissonance. This occurs when experience of the world clashes with belief structure. Hull refers to this as 'bafflement' (ibid:57ff). He describes being baffled is when an individual reaches their limit of being able to comprehend a particular situation within their worldview. Belief structures are challenged to the extent that their power to make meaning becomes impotent. Such cognitive dissonance can arise within the belief system itself when it encounters an alternative belief system or when the belief system sits at odds to the prevailing culture (ibid:97). Hull writes that the experience of being religiously baffled is very common amongst adults because their religious symbol-system is often based in an understanding of faith stuck in the secure nostalgia of childhood. Yet this childhood understanding can be contradictory to their experience of the world which can easily lead to bafflement. This common experience underlines the importance of continuing religious learning for adults. It can also provide a valuable learning opportunity for adults to explore their bafflement and can potentially lead to renewal and transformation of theological understanding.

A tribal, henotheistic faith, however, cannot allow for such creative exploration because it would threaten its existence. At its extremes, henotheism responds to bafflement in three ways, all of which reinforce boundaries between members and non-members (ibid:177ff). First, it turns inwards, ignoring the beliefs and opinions of others as well as the challenges of the outside world, separating itself both physically and socially in a corporate act of introversion. The group and its members withdraw into a self-referential world, insulated from outside influence. Second, 'thought-stopping' occurs when followers unconditionally surrender themselves to the authority of their tribe. Questions that arise from bafflement

are suppressed, thereby preventing learning. Members are encouraged to stop critical thought and accept the status quo. Whilst some might find this surrender comforting, others feel guilty that their bafflement challenges their faith and they dismiss their questions outright. Third, there is a hardening of religious ideology. The belief system becomes elaborate and inflexible. Any education is from a carefully prescribed manual of instruction and is based on the individual learner's accumulation of information. The outcome of such belief is that 'far from something that excites curiosity, draws into fresh expression, re-kindles enthusiasm and increasingly integrates life around powerful and creative symbols, Christian believing is experience primarily as a source of guilt and uncertainty' (ibid: 117). Within a henotheistic religious community, belief requires members to become totally set apart from the world. Community identity becomes inseparably linked to the preservation of its monolithic ideology.

Hull's solution is that the task of adult religious education should be to move learners towards his interpretation of *monotheism*. Rather than belief in one deity, he describes monotheism in the context of modern society as a belief whose loyalties are unified and universal. This is as opposed to the divided loyalties of the polytheist and the extreme tribalism of the henotheist. Monotheism is when faith becomes all-encompassing. It is integrated into the whole of the self and the entirety of experience. He argues that each believer needs to build their own 'personal construct' of faith (ibid:102ff). It is not enough to receive other constructs uncritically. Each person needs to have their own dialogue with the received structures of any belief system in order to relate them meaningfully to their own lives. This will involve directly confronting instances of bafflement in the learning process to ensure that they are worked through to a satisfactory conclusion. In stark contrast to henotheism, it encourages learners to be open and to embark on a constant process of realignment of their faith with personal experience and changes in society. This can lead to belief that is flexible enough to cope with the challenges that experience brings. Herein lies an important observation for education in churches. If the vagueness of polytheism and the prescriptiveness of henotheism are to be avoided, learning in churches needs to provide opportunities for their members to engage with cognitive

dissonance, raise the questions that this brings, and allow their ideology to be challenged and transformed.

1.2.3 Psychological Models

Hull suggests that this monotheism might be approached through personal understanding of the evolution of individual faith constructs (ibid:111). He emphasises the importance for faith to evolve alongside the psychologically developing person. Hull recognises that for those brought up in the Church, childhood experience and images of God and the Church will always be primary but he also sees that experiences in adult life inevitably draw these images into a process of change. He writes, 'for the adult religious educator, the central point is not that he ought always to ensure that the religious education of adults remains experiential, but that nothing he can do will prevent it from being and remaining experiential' (ibid:151). Hull suggests that the religious education of children should be done 'clearly rather than firmly' with an open mind towards different interpretations. Due to the strong emotional links to childhood images, too rigid an approach to religious learning in children can lead to faith that is not sufficiently flexible to deal with the demands and experiences of adult life. Effective religious learning in adults, therefore, should always take into account the influence of childhood but not be confined to it. Childhood is often seen as a place of security and in moments of crisis adults can return to the refuge of childhood thinking. The childhood interpretation of faith is highly unlikely to be compatible with the way in which most people perceive the world later in life. Yet for many, religious learning remains fossilised in childhood whilst the rest of their experience changes around it. An important purpose of adult religious learning should be to allow personal faith to develop alongside the person and to loosen the ties to childhood.

Many theories that focus on stages of personal development suggest that from childhood onwards, individuals encounter a number of different ways of experiencing the world. Hull focuses on the work of E.H. Erikson, Carl Jung, Daniel Levinson, Robert Kegan, Jean Piaget and James Fowler (1985, Chapter 4). He observes that faith has often been understood to stand apart from these

theories. Yet, if taken seriously, different developmental stages provide significant opportunities for believers to re-evaluate their faith. The most critical times are the transitions between stages, when previous modes of understanding, including religious belief, are significantly challenged. From the perspective of religious learning, individuals need help to develop their faith as they move through these transitional times so that it does not become encased in a previous developmental mode. Hull writes, 'the evolving history of biblical interpretation in the life of a Christian adult may be experienced with distress, with periods of confusion and doubt, which will correspond to the experiences of loss of self with which each transitional period is associated' (ibid:183). Individual religious understanding and development should take place alongside self-understanding and development rather than being isolated from it. Faith stories and other practical aspects of belief will be perceived and interpreted differently by individuals at different stages throughout their lives.

One task of the religious educator is to facilitate the recognition and exploration of these links with psychological development. An important part of Hull's discussion centres on James Fowler's *Stages of Faith* (ibid:185ff; Fowler, 1981). Fowler's six stages chart faith development from childhood into adulthood. An individual first moves from imitating parental behaviour (intuitive-projective faith) to simple acceptance of faith (mythical-literal faith). This includes belief in a deity whose existence is represented through stories (the Bible) and actions (liturgy). These initial stages are grounded in an uncritical acceptance of faith. At adolescence, development usually moves into the synthetic-conventional stage in which adolescents construct a faith that confirms to the world-views of others and belief remains tacit and unquestioning. Hull argues that this is the ideal stage for a church because it is an accepting but still unchallenging faith. The status quo is preserved and authority remains untouched. Indeed, he suggests that this is a very common stage in which adult believers remain. He writes, 'it is in the interests of religious institutions to sponsor their membership up to stage three but not beyond it, or, at any rate, only to sponsor into stage four a minority of people who are destined for the defence, proclamation and leadership of the faith' (ibid:189). This fourth stage (individuative-reflective) is when people begin to see beyond the confines of their belief structure and forge first-hand faith for

themselves. The self questions previously accepted norms of faith, including the meanings of symbols and stories and the authority of the institution. This can lead to individuals leaving church communities because of their failure to engage with this transition. It represents an important opportunity for Christian educators as they seek to provide an environment within which these challenges can be explored. Working with people as they experience the transition between synthetic-conventional and individuative-reflective faith has to be one of the key goals of adult religious education in churches. Enabling people to allow their faith to negotiate this stage has the potential to create congregations who are critically reflective and can move beyond static belief. This also opens the door to the two remaining stages, conjunctive faith and universalising faith, which continue this trajectory of critical thinking, growing dialogue with other points of view and encouraging an ongoing process of transformation.

1.2.4 Summary

Overall, Hull proposes an approach to adult religious learning that encourages critical engagement with other traditions, other faiths and other worldviews. This pushes churches to promote a universal, monotheistic understanding of faith rather than one that builds ever more elaborate defences against the world around it. He promotes a faith that is open to transformation in response to experiences it encounters. Individual perception of faith changes alongside the evolution of the self and adult religious educators, therefore, need to have a working understanding of developmental/psychological theories. The aim of the church should not be to preserve but to create critically engaged congregations keen to move forward their understanding of their own faith and how this is expressed both inside and outside the church environment.²

² *What Helps Disciples Grow?* (Foster, 2016) surveyed over one thousand Christians from thirty churches in the West Midlands. One question asked participants the extent to which they had experienced times of growth in their faith. Whilst many had experienced times of growth, the report acknowledges that 'few feel it's a straightforward journey: most also identified times of non-growth and times of being stuck spiritually, and the majority found they'd grown through new experiences and times of difficulty or loss' (2016:11). This supports the idea that experience can have a significant impact on an

1.3 Professor Jeff Astley: *Ordinary Theology*

Jeff Astley, honorary professor of Theology and Religion at Durham University, developed a theory of ‘ordinary theology’ which he first explored in an eponymous book (Astley, 2002). He believes that although there is the formal theology of the academy, this means neither that those who are not formally theologically educated are incapable of thinking theologically nor that their theology is irrelevant. Christian believers inside and outside churches reflect on the nature of God and express these thoughts in their own language regardless of their theological literacy. He describes his study as one of practical theology because it is rooted in context and in practice (ibid:1ff). Astley writes about how the Church and academic theology need to observe and learn from ‘the content, pattern and processes of ordinary people’s articulation of their religious understanding’ (ibid:56). His work is based in his experience of parish ministry and the education of lay Christian adults alongside university teaching and research. Astley’s concept of ordinary theology is key to this thesis because it challenges the locus of theology by placing the individual at the centre of religious learning. The characteristics of ordinary theology will be explored before reflecting on its consequences for parish-based religious learning.

1.3.1 *Learning Versus Education*

Astley’s starting point for his exploration of ordinary theology is to emphasise the importance of ‘learning’ as opposed to ‘education’. Education is often thought of as a deliberate attempt to bring about learning and is associated with explicit attempts at ‘self-conscious critical reflection and explicit cognitive understanding’ (ibid:4). Education is also thought of as the process of institutional schooling from primary school to university. Astley stresses, however, that much learning takes place outside these institutions: at home, at work and at leisure. This is true of Christian communities in which people learn from deliberate acts of teaching and experience of worship and conversation. Understood as a lasting change in an

individual’s faith and they could benefit from help from the Church enabling them to explore it.

individual, learning is not always deliberate and can take place implicitly within personal experience. Other elements, from culture and context to participation in activities, similarly bring about learning. Learning can often be unintended, taking place in situations that have unrelated primary objectives (see also John Kay's discussion of obliquity (Kay, 2011)).

The learning process, therefore, is broader than often thought. Ordinary theology takes into account the 'hidden curriculum' of values, beliefs and feelings. Learning is anything that brings about a lasting change in an individual's understanding that is triggered by experience. Astley argues that Christian learning does not take place through the educational process of acquiring understanding of historical doctrines but through the experience of the practices and context of Christian life. Astley distinguishes between education that is *objective* and learning that is *subjective*. We can be educated *about* something but we can only learn it when it is *felt* and *experienced*. Astley writes about the difference between *learning about religion* and *embracing the faith* (Astley, 2002:25ff). Referring to Wittgenstein, in the former, learners come to understand what Wittgenstein describes as the 'grammar of faith'. This is the key structures, concepts and stories of faith that allow learners to understand, empathise with and even assent to that faith. This learning *about* faith, however, is one step removed from belief because it does not require emotional involvement. Astley writes, 'we do not *fully* understand religious concepts unless we feel these accompanying emotions and are disposed to behave in a manner appropriate to the beliefs and affects that we have learned' (ibid:27). Like a language, grammar and basic phrases can be learned in the classroom, but it cannot be spoken or written fluently without exposure to its country and culture of origin. The Christian learner embraces faith by moving from a dispassionate belief *that* God exists to a more self-involved and all-encompassing belief *in* God. Like Hull's all-encompassing notion of monotheism, belief *in* God is described by Astley as a 'passionate embrace' and occurs when believers know of God within the totality of their experiences and religious practices (ibid:29). Learning in a faith context, therefore, is often latent because it takes place as a consequence of participation. In order to move from an objective belief *that* to a subjective belief *in*, religious

learning needs to be based in experience and context. This move cannot take place without involvement in the life, culture, and practice of a Church community.

1.3.2 Broadening The Base Of Theology

This subjective understanding of theology leads Astley to define ordinary theology as follows:

Ordinary Christian theology is my phrase for *the theology and theologizing of Christians who have received little or no theological education of a scholarly, academic or systematic kind*. 'Ordinary', in this context, implies *non-scholarly and non-academic*. (ibid:56)

Astley broadens the understanding of theology through this definition. Theology is often defined as an academic subject with a number of associated disciplines and is concerned with a scientific exploration of faith (ibid:52). As a scholarly subject, theology is an exclusive discipline confined to a small number of qualified individuals in university departments. Astley widens the definition of theology beyond the academy. As a more inclusive understanding, theology can be defined as any process of reflection about God and thought about the questions of life that are raised through faith (ibid:53).

Astley explores this further through the work of Edward Farley. In *Theologia*, Farley argues that the eighteenth century saw a critical fragmentation of theology (Farley, 1994:33-44). The development of universities and theology faculties led them to become centres of academic theology. The parallel growth of seminaries created a body of clergy who were experts in pastoral theology. This fragmentation of theology dramatically distanced theology from the laity. Up to this point, theology was understood to be the wisdom of the believer bound up in their context and practice. The focus of theological discourse was on the believer and the way in which they led their lives through their belief in God. Astley considers Farley's use of the word *habitus*. More than the idea of doing things out of habit, *habitus* concerns how self-understanding of faith influences a believer's entire disposition, leading them to behave in a way that is concurrent

with their all-encompassing belief. Astley seeks to reclaim the importance of *habitus* in theology as the way in which faith is lived out. If on the one hand academic theology distances theology from the personal, on the other hand *habitus* orientates theology towards the self. It is 'no mere cleverness or lust for information, therefore, but embraces an orientation towards God that involves, and is an expression, of learning how to live before God – and, in this sense, *to live theologically*' (Astley, 2002:55). Astley describes this idea of a more personal theology as opposed to rigorous theological study as the 'jumping-point' for his exploration of ordinary theology.

1.3.3 Key Characteristics Of Ordinary Theology

Astley develops his idea of ordinary theology by listing its characteristics which can be summarised under three main areas: *unrefined*, *contextual*, and *significant* (ibid:57ff).³

Ordinary theology is *unrefined* because its expression is often tentative and words used can appear crude in comparison to the complex language of the academy. The belief that true theology dwells in the clerical and academic realms and that personal theological opinions carry little weight causes people to be hesitant in expressing their views because they fear that their lack of formal language would lead them to be dismissed by professional theologians. Ideas expressed in ordinary theology are usually undeveloped and might be easily undermined by robust critical reflection. Ordinary theology's rawness, however, shows that it is in a constant process of adjustment to all that it encounters. Astley

³ Ordinary theology is: (1) learned and learning (learned from a particular context which places it in a constant developmental process); (2) tentative (believers are hesitant in expressing what they believe); (3) lay (it offers a different perspective to that of academic theologians); (4) significant (an individual takes their ordinary beliefs seriously); (5) meaningful (it has profound links with an individual's life and experience); (6) subterranean (it is largely a hidden theology); (7) religious (it is closely related to religious practice and spirituality); (8) kneeling and celebratory (it emerges from prayer and the living practice of faith); (9) irregular (more fragmented and less systematic); (10) mother-tongue (expressed in the language of the home and familiar conversation); and (11) onlook (an expression of how an individual perceives the world) (Astley, 2002:57-86).

describes it as a theology that is both *learned* by being acquired through life and also *learning* as it is constantly transformed through new experiences. It is not a theology that is set in stone. Expressions of ordinary theology are not systematic and their nature means that they will not fit into highly refined dogmatics. They will leave loose ends and unanswered questions. The importance of ordinary theology, however, lies in its origins as a lay theology. It is theology that is specifically not that of academic experts or clerical professionals and Astley believes that 'taking ordinary theology seriously can only help in overcoming that "great gulf fixed" between clergy and laity in most of our parishes' (ibid:64). As a theology of the people, it has the potential to empower the laity.

The importance of ordinary theology also lies in its *contextual* nature. It is intimately connected to the religious practice and lives of everyday Christians. Ordinary theology might not be full of systematic, abstract concepts but it is theology that is expressed through the interpretative lenses of people's experiences. This makes it an intimate and immediate way of doing theology that is not grounded in academic reflection but in direct responses to what believers see and do. This is not theology that is painstakingly reflected upon. It is a theology that is done in action. Astley uses the language of it being a 'kneeling' theology because it is directly linked with religious practice. He observes, 'ordinary theology is the *natural* way of doing theology of people on their knees, as they lean into the eternal mystery that is both inside and beyond us all. For ordinary theologians, their kneeling God-talk also incorporates the deepest value convictions on which they rest their lives and their deaths' (ibid:76). This is not critically reflective theology, but theology that is expressed as people live out their relationships with God. This has the potential to be an extremely fruitful source of theology. Astley compares it to nutrient-rich undergrowth that gives life to plants that thrive and flower in the open air. Yet as undergrowth, it is also a hidden theology. It is not manifestly accessible in books and usually remains latent within the lives of everyday Christians.

This in turn makes ordinary theology *significant*. These beliefs are not abstract because they are held by real people and are expressed in everyday lives. Astley believes that, without straying too far into relativism, we can only ever understand

theology from our own perspective. Ordinary theology provides views of faith that arise from individual insights. These cannot be revealed through disinterested academic theological analysis but through encouraging people to talk about their own beliefs. Just as personal perspective sheds light on theology, so theology can also bring significance to experience. Theology can only become truly relevant when a profound relationship is established between belief and experience. This is when *belief that* is transformed into *belief in*. Situations in which individuals encounter deep religious growth are more likely to be found in experiences that challenge us than academic study. For example, ‘facing the death of others and facing our own death (which is always part of our experience in facing the death of others) fires the crucible of ordinary theologizing’ (ibid:70). Like Hull’s bafflement and moving between stages of psychological development, experience provides unique opportunities to learn and meaningful theological insights.

1.3.4 Consequences Of Ordinary Theology

Astley’s ordinary theology places the individual religious learner at the epicentre of faith. In this respect, Astley notes that religion is something that is learned:

The greater part of the edifice of our religious beliefs is learned, as are the associated religious attitudes, religious values and dispositions to act and experience in religious ways. (ibid:17)

Culture and tradition are passed from one person or group to another, ensuring continuity. Yet religious culture and tradition are not unchanging artefacts. Astley’s claim that religion is not only *learned* but is also *learning* is important. As each individual and generation assumes faith, it is learned within the context of their experience, bringing new insights and leading to ongoing learning which might change the structures of the faith itself. The primary locus of this learning is the individual. All religious activity, from its doctrines to its practices, can only be experienced by each person. A faith journey is not about learning from others and assuming that their understanding is passed down from one generation to another like a family heirloom. Individuals may be influenced by others but only

insofar as this invokes a change within them. As Astley writes, 'I can only have my own faith; I cannot own anyone else's' (ibid:20). Religious learning requires us to accept that faith changes as people change. People are confronted with baffling experiences that disturb closely held religious values. Theology needs the malleability to evolve alongside experiences of life, context and culture. Most importantly, it is through experience that people make connections with the Christian story. Astley writes:

The subjective meaning that a particular idea or belief has for someone depends on a range of connotations and associations, both cognitive and affective, that are peculiar to his or her life experience and past learning. This sort of learning can never be plucked out of its context and picked clean; it always carries with it some of the soil in which it is nurtured. If we ignore the learning context of a person's Christian theology, we shall not be able adequately to understand or describe it. (ibid:13)

Christian religious learning should seek to understand the soil in which people's faith has been sown and to listen to the theology that has grown from roots that extend deep into it. This theology can then be nurtured in ongoing, lifelong learning.

Astley acknowledges that his approach is not without flaws. Ordinary theology's stress on the individual and experience can be seen to be overly subjective and prone to relativism (ibid:123ff). Validating individual responses might lead to a vastly varied number of different theologies that are confused, incoherent and unsystematic. Astley strongly rebuts these criticisms. Regarding individuality, he describes personal faith as something that is 'in a conversational dance with others, in and through my contextualized practice' (ibid:20). Our individual understanding can never be entirely subjective as it arises from dialogue with others through whom it is also validated. He argues that ordinary theology is pragmatic (ibid:146ff). It encourages the church to listen to people and to base its communication of the gospel in a response to any context. It is also theological because it allows remote theological discourse as well as the Church's normative practices, doctrines and texts to be tested against the empirical evidence of

individual lives (ibid:148ff). It thereby encourages development of understanding by reappraising the past in a creative dialogue with the present. This is not theology divorced from the past. It seeks to create new understanding from this dialogue between the past of faith and its experience in the present.

1.3.5 Summary

The implication of ordinary theology for theological learning is that it is not about uncritically passing on information from experts to learners as in the authoritarian extreme of direct learning. It needs to take into account the rootedness of theology in the context of the lives and experiences of individuals. The whole church can learn from this rich tapestry of belief through creative dialogue with its traditions, practices and texts.

1.4 Denham Grierson: *Transforming A People Of God*

In *Transforming a People of God*, Denham Grierson, a former member of the United Faculty of Theology in Melbourne, focuses on the difficulties facing newly-ordained clergy as they transfer from seminary to parish (Grierson, 1984). This leads him to propose an approach for the interpretation of the culture and practice of individual churches. Whilst Astley and Hull reflect on personal understanding of faith, Grierson is concerned with the context of community and explores the theology contained in practice, ritual and language.

1.4.1 The Problem Of Transition

Grierson begins by identifying an issue with the transition between seminary and parish (ibid:14ff). A trainee minister attending seminary often experiences 'de-tribalisation' in which they are separated from the parish culture they know extremely well. Seminary challenges identity and theology as well as previous understanding of ministry and the parish. At the other end of formation, the newly-ordained priest faces another culture shock in their transition to the parish. Grierson suggests that the Church presented in seminary is 'neat, tidy, and generally civilised' whereas the reality of individual congregations is that they are

'never neat, sometimes barely Christian and only rarely civilised' (ibid:18). The new minister realises that what has been learned in the universalising context of the seminary cannot be transferred directly into the particularity of the parish context. He writes, 'the understanding of faithful living of a local community is inevitably shaped by the unique and peculiar events of its own life' (ibid:21). Each parish has its own peculiar practices arising from its experience. A newly-arrived ordained person has the status of a 'welcomed stranger'. Her position confers status but does not mean that she understands the life of the congregation or is fully welcomed into it. At the beginning the new minister is on the margins and risks being unwittingly drawn into conflict because she does not understand the intricacies of the situation. Grierson illustrates this through the example of a women's group from a congregation that placed a vase of flowers on the altar each week (ibid:23-24). Moved by the liturgical and theological principles learned in seminary, the new minister attempted to remove them. This led to significant conflict:

The conflict proved to be an illustration of two worlds passing each other. The practice had arisen in the particular congregation positively as a confession of God's grace in renewing the world daily, and negatively because of the attempt of a former minister to close the women's group down. A vase of flowers was, to the women's group, a symbol both of their identity as a group and a confession of their faith as Christians. (ibid:24)

Had the minister investigated the vase's presence on the altar, this conflict might have been avoided and the situation transformed into a learning opportunity for both minister and people. The vase was placed there for reasons rooted in the group's deeply-held theological views and past experiences. The minister's action intended to improve liturgical practice but had an unexpected secondary result.

The events and feelings that shape congregations lie beneath the surface of its actions and rituals and are neither easily expressed by its members nor immediately accessible to the outsider (often including the minister). Whilst many communities outwardly share many similarities, such as the liturgy in the Church

of England, each community's life is inwardly different. Grierson suggests that a task of education in the parish context should be to identify congregation-specific practices and elicit their implicit theologies (ibid:35). In this way, latent meanings are discovered and the community's practices can be supported and celebrated or challenged and transformed. Such practices need first to be named, understood and interpreted.

1.4.2 Method Of Congregational Analysis

Grierson proposes a three-stage process of *naming*, *interpreting* and *remaking* through which a community can be led towards transformation. The person undertaking this process, usually a minister, uses the methodology of participant observation. As an active participant in the life of the church community, the minister works from within it to understand what it means to belong.

The first stage is the *naming* of what is important to the community (1984:53ff). This involves observing the life of the community with the intention of identifying those things that are worth deeper exploration. Grierson suggests that this can be found in six areas. First, the observer needs to consider the *time* in which the community dwells. To what extent are the actions of the community grounded in the past, present and future? A community that is too focussed on its past risks becoming moribund whilst one that is too focussed on its future can fail to learn from events in its history. Too much focus on the present comes at the expense of both past and future. Second, the important sacred *space* needs to be found. These spaces, often be associated with ritual, can be auditory (preaching, reading, music, bells), visual (altars, vestments, art, memorials) and sensory (the exchange of the Peace, washing feet, lighting a candle). They are exceptionally emotive and congregations can find it extremely difficult to change them. Understanding the hidden theologies that underpin them can provide an important threshold for understanding more about church communities. Third, noting the *language* of a community is key. Grierson differentiates between the public, outer speech of a church community and its inner, shared language. The former is how a congregation projects itself into the outside world. Whilst it might show how a congregation wants to be perceived, it does not show what is really

happening. The inner language is how members of a congregation communicate with each other. It is the predominant linguistic symbols which are hidden from the outside world. What words, phrases and images are regularly used? Fourth, the *intimacy* of a community is important. Grierson believes that this can be found in the closeness of church members – their willingness to share, laugh, respect and touch. It can be discovered in shared actions, rites of passage and times of joy and sadness as well as in their commitment to the community's important symbols, actions and common story. These are the things that bind a community together emotionally. Fifth, in order to exist together, a community has to have *consensus*. Consensus gives a group its corporate identity but is more than adherence to a commonly-held belief system. It can be consensus about areas of communal life such as leadership style, mission, change and interpretation of events. Grierson points out that this can be flexible because it needs to respond to the different events and experiences the community faces. Sixth, the *circumstances* of a congregation provoke different responses in theological understanding and action. Social, demographic, geographical, physical, ethnic and economic factors all influence the behaviour of any church group. This is a more objective overview of the external contextual influences that shape a congregation. Taking these six aspects of naming into account allows the participant-observer to create a detailed description of the most important aspects of the community's life together.

The second stage of Grierson's process is *interpreting* (ibid:97ff). Interpreting takes those things that have been named and considers how they relate to the community's past, present and future. Concerning their association to the past, it considers the events, people, and objects which are remembered. Each community cherishes its significant moments, heroes and artefacts. This stage asks why these are cherished. It should also reflect on what the community chooses to forget. Congregations will value some things whilst being noticeably silent about others. What is suppressed in the collective memory is as important as what is celebrated. The relationship with the past is important because 'it is in learning to value the history of a particular people and in owning or claiming that story that a community can be instructed and guided to an awareness of its identity in the present' (ibid:104). In order to learn, congregations must be aware

of all that has led them to their current situation, both that which is acclaimed and also that which caused hurt. The future aspect is also important. Grierson discusses three ways in which the future of a church community can be interpreted. The myths that are valued, religious stories or otherwise, point towards the journey the group wishes to take. There will also be images of *hope*. These are often associated with ideas of *release* from the current situation and renewal of the community's life. Finally, there is *vision* through which the community anticipates its ideal future. Alongside the past and the future, Grierson wants communities to 'claim' their present. They need to understand that the present is constantly referring to the past and looking towards the future. This requires interpreting symbols and rituals by considering how they relate to the past and the future. It allows congregations to recognise the meanings that are hidden within all that they do, thereby giving them a deeper meaning and perspective.

The final stage is *remaking* in which the community reflects on the previous two stages in order to find new images and practices which can move them forward. The first two stages give a community a clear perspective of their identity. This can lead congregations to adopt new images and metaphors that can give them new direction. It can also lead to the rejection of previous images and practices that are deemed unsuitable. Overall, Grierson calls for a critical examination of the community. Only this self-understanding can help the community move towards potential new openings for ministry, understandings of church and faith, and practices in worship, mission and education.

1.4.3 Summary

Grierson's intention is to allow ministers to identify the most valued practices of a community and consider how they have been shaped through them and how they might be changed. This is a dialogical process. It exposes the meaning behind church practices and seeks to engage in a transformational conversation. Learning in the parish should not be about superimposing external, objective theological knowledge on congregations. Moreover, it should be about uncovering the theological understandings that are implicitly contained within the

parish's actions, rituals, words and spaces. The particular should be favoured over the universal.

1.5 Robert Grainger: *Educating Anglicans*

Whilst Hull addresses the barriers to adult religious learning and Astley and Grierson consider theoretical aspects focussing on individuals and communities, Robert Grainger's interest in *Educating Anglicans* is in how learning takes place within parishes (Grainger, 2013). A priest, counsellor and groupworker, Grainger conducted empirical research into the effectiveness of different types of groupwork within the educational approaches of the Church of England. The premise for his research was the growing promotion of education for discipleship within parishes, which seeks to grow corporate identity amongst its members and reverse decreasing church membership by attracting new members. This was proposed in the report *Education for Discipleship* (Church of England Ministry Division, 2005). Many of the educational approaches currently used in parishes involve groupwork. Grainger's research questioned the effectiveness of the models being used. His hypothesis was that didactic learning and more experiential types of groupwork have different effects on group members and that churches need to offer a more mixed approach to education.

1.5.1 Current Adult Lay Education In The Church Of England

Grainger identifies three main ways in which groupwork is currently used in the Church of England (Grainger, 2013:50ff). These are bible study groups, support and team-building groups and groups at a diocesan level developed in response to *Education for Discipleship*. At one end of current practice, many churches embark on informal Bible study in small groups. These groups are intended to help participants improve their biblical knowledge and interpretation and are usually led by someone with a level of expertise. They consist of reading and discussing a chosen text or systematically working through books of the Bible. The approach varies between parishes with some being tightly controlled, leading participants towards a certain reading, whilst others offer a freer approach to interpretation. Grainger observes that the effectiveness of such groups is difficult

to assess because of their informality and their tendency to be relatively short-lived within the changing circumstances of church communities. At the other end, churches use formal, explicitly evangelistic forms of Bible study. Grainger discusses *Alpha* and *Emmaus* within the parameters of Bible study because 'each of them, to some extent, involves the study of Biblical texts and the assimilation of information contained there, with the aim of persuading people to become Christians' (ibid:51). *Alpha* and *Emmaus* use Biblical narratives and metaphors as a starting point for what is often referred to as 'process evangelisation', through which people are guided through key aspects of faith accompanied by committed members of faith communities. Grainger describes *Alpha* as 'organised, authoritarian and mission-centred' (ibid:52). *Emmaus*, which Grainger believes to be more imaginative than *Alpha*, uses small groups to explore biblical passages and asks questions about how group members might apply their learning to their lives. Both courses follow carefully prescribed content and session structure, although *Emmaus* is more flexible than *Alpha*. Grainger cites Mike Booker and Mark Ireland's overview of Church of England evangelism (Booker and Ireland, 2005). They write that despite their intention to use exploratory groupwork as a means of cognitive learning, *Alpha* and *Emmaus* have 'a strong didactic content that starts with the Church's agenda rather than the agenda of those who are beginning to ask big questions about the meaning of life' (ibid:39). This groupwork is geared towards growing church membership but provides scant opportunity to engage with faith openly and creatively. This is of little help to the exploration of individual and corporate experience and belief that has been seen to be so important through the discussion of Hull, Astley and Grierson.

Grainger believes that courses such as *Alpha* and *Emmaus* are also used in ways other than their primary evangelistic purpose (Grainger, 2013:57ff). Once again referring to Booker and Ireland, whose analysis noted that one third of those involved in *Alpha* in the new millennium have been helpers and leaders from within host congregations, he observes that these courses are often used to support established church communities and to strengthen their feeling of identity as church members. Although not the stated purpose of the courses, those who help in a variety of ways to deliver them also learn through their participation. He

also refers to how *Emmaus* has been used not only as an evangelistic tool, but also for team-building within congregations. The shared sense of purpose and belonging that this creates can give individuals a strong sense of confidence, security and identity. Grainger believes that the more prescriptive nature of the content of *Alpha*, whose sessions focus on playing a video followed by subsequent discussion, is less suited to team-building than *Emmaus*, whose content is more dependent on sharing and discussion within 'buzz groups'. Nevertheless, the influence of *Alpha* and *Emmaus* stretches far beyond those who may be at the start of their Christian journey. There is much secondary value in the practice of these courses that extends far beyond their stated primary objective of evangelism.

The third use of groupwork is based on *Education for Discipleship*, which suggested a structure for Diocesan-based programmes of learning (Church of England Ministry Division, 2005). Emerging from *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church* (Church of England Ministry Division, 2003) which encouraged more collaborative ministry, academically accredited programmes and a need for the church as a whole to deepen its understanding of faith, these diocesan programmes are intended to help the church become a 'learning church' in which all Christians are encouraged to further their understanding of faith. Grainger discovered that at the time of his research, nineteen dioceses were offering programmes based on the *Education for Discipleship* blueprint. His analysis shows that these courses predominantly follow the *Emmaus* model of groupwork. Although they use 'buzz groups', their priority is to pass on information from leaders to learners rather than allowing the opportunity for experiences to be explored within these groups. Grainger's conclusion is that, although these courses promote the use of imagination amongst participants, their pedagogy is highly structured and authoritative in style (Grainger, 2013:64-5). He refers to them having an 'indirect directiveness' which is disguised through use of image and metaphor rather than direct presentation.

1.5.2 Three Types Of Groupwork

Grainger identifies three types of groupwork which are relevant to learning within the church context. These are text-based learning, process-orientated learning and art-based learning (ibid:34ff). In the context of the church, text-based learning is concerned with instruction about faith and relationship with God. It is usually based on pre-prepared teaching materials, follows a syllabus and is structured around a series of lessons that are predominantly teacher-led. Participants typically receive the material in advance, often in the format of a course booklet. The leader's task is to guide the group through the material following the guidelines. There will often be more than sufficient material for each session and the group leader can choose which parts to include depending on the length of each session. These groups are concerned with the transmission of information and learning is seen to occur at the point of reception of what is being communicated. This type of group is the most likely to be steered towards a more uncritical understanding of direct learning.

Process-orientated groupwork uses the group itself and relationships within it as the source and context for learning. The group leader acts as a facilitator rather than a teacher, enabling the group to explore its identity and experiences through identifying and resolving conflicts that arise. Sessions are likely to concentrate on a theme suggested by the group leader and agreed by the group. The sole content of the sessions are the thoughts, feelings and experiences expressed by group members. Learning occurs through exploring them and responding to the views of others. The leader encourages as many members of the group as possible to participate, but there is no expectation to do so. This is the opposite of text-based learning groups. There are no external sources of material and learning takes place from what participants bring to the group. It is purely experiential.

Arts-based learning focuses on the use of imagination and creativity to stimulate further understanding. The group has a shared experience within a facilitated and secure environment which is explored under the direction of the group leader. The group sessions in arts-based learning do not have set texts or material. Their

content arises from an engagement with a particular scenario that is enacted by the group. Grainger suggests that the sessions would consist of three main stages. First, members introduce themselves in the context of a light-hearted game or role-play. Second, the group acts out the central scenario. Third, the group reflects on the experience of being involved in the central scenario and considers what has been learned. Within arts-based groups, the learning takes place within this final stage of reflection when the group contemplates what has happened. There are some similarities with the process-orientated groups because the focus for learning is the group's experience of participating in the scenario, although in arts-based groups the content of the scenario might be introduced by the facilitator. In this respect, arts-based groups also stand in contrast to text-based learning groups because their learning does not rely on the transmission of information.

1.5.3 Empirical Research

The empirical element of Grainger's research was to recruit participants to engage with each of these three types of groupwork and to assess their written depositions against chosen criteria. These criteria were based on the opposite poles of validation/rejection, safety/danger, enrichment/impoverishment, and belonging/alienation. According to Grainger, for a group to operate at its most effective, it needs to be working within the positive aspects of these criteria. He concludes that the arts-based groups scored highest with safety, enrichment and validation. The process groups scored highest with belonging, whilst the text-based groups scored least in all areas. These results do not lead Grainger to criticise task-based learning groups because all three types of groupwork are successful against the criteria to varying degrees. Learning can take place within a test-based, teacher-centric learning environment. Yet these groups affected the participants differently to the two experiential groups because of their authoritarian approach. Grainger concludes that:

The present investigation suggests that for the purposes of Christian learning, a policy of limiting groups to those in which an authoritarian presence and structure restricts the scope allowed for self-expression on

the members' part is seriously to undervalue groups as human phenomena by under-rating their ability to contribute to the way human beings learn some of the most vital things about themselves, one another and God. This, of course, means how we learn about the Church. (ibid:187)

Whilst text-based groups might have an important role within the more formative aspect of parish-based learning, they should not be used alone. This might risk suppressing freedom of expression and thereby oppressing participants. Grainger's recommendation is that groupwork in parishes should adopt a mixed mode approach, encouraging greater use of process-orientated and arts-based groups and reducing emphasis on approaches that involve direct learning.

1.5.4 Summary

According to Grainger, the predominant method of groupwork in parish-based education in the Church of England is text-based learning which presents a significant weakness. To focus almost entirely on one learning method limits its success. Grainger's key recommendations are that the Church should be more experimental in its approach to learning and that further research is needed into the best approaches for congregational learning with a view to extending its effectiveness (ibid:197).

1.5 Concluding Comments

Each of the four authors examined in this chapter reflects on different aspects of parish-based learning in the Church of England. Four central principles about parish learning can be gleaned from this examination which underpin the rest of this research. The purpose of these principles is to steer the learning process in the Church away from the danger of henotheism highlighted by Hull. Such a Church risks focussing heavily on doctrine and rules, intensifying the gap between members and non-members, and distancing it from society. First, theology is not just based in the academy and the seminary. It can be uncovered within the everyday lives of individuals and the shared symbolic structures and

hidden theologies of Christian communities. To value this latent theology on a par with the theology of the academy and to bring the two into a mutually creative dialogue should be a central task of theological learning in parishes. Second, it is important to recognise that people will understand religious symbols and rituals in different ways according to their own experiences and stage of life. Parishes need to provide opportunities for people to explore this meaning along with instances of cognitive dissonance. They need to be enabled to make connections with the various aspects of their lives so that their faith is neither trapped in the nostalgic understanding of their childhood nor acts as a defence against the challenges of the modern world. Third, learning does not only take place in situations explicitly focused on education. Every church community has its own hidden curriculum that is founded in the context of its own experience. A vital part of the religious learning process is to uncover what is hidden from view, be that in the ordinary theology of informal conversations in the home and elsewhere, practices that are peculiar to any particular congregation, or unnoticed examples of learning. Fourth, the pedagogical approach most widely demonstrated in the Church of England is directive. Whilst a text-based, direct learning approach can have its place, if each of the previous three principles are to be implemented, the Church's pedagogy must broaden to include ways which allow learners to engage deeply with their individual and corporate experience.

Chapter 2: Key Developments From 1945 – From *Towards The Conversion Of England To Mission-Shaped Church*

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter highlighted the key areas of academic thought behind this thesis. This chapter will widen the discussion by placing it in the context of the history of the Church of England from the end of the Second World War, focussing on the events, changes, and developments that contribute most to the discussion of adult religious learning.

First, it will provide a brief overview of attendance statistics and the issues raised by declining attendance. This narrative of decline and the effort to reverse it are amongst the most important influences on current Church of England initiatives. Second, it will discuss the key points of the 1945 report *Towards the Conversion of England*. This report, referred to by the Archbishop of Canterbury and in several recent reports to General Synod, shows that issues of attendance and Christian commitment were already part of a lively discussion about the Church's future over seventy years ago. It proposed a solution to declining numbers that encouraged the Church to concentrate its efforts on evangelism. Third, there will be a summary of important parts of the Church's history between 1945 and 2000. This was a period during which the Church was focused on significant organisational changes that sought to make it a more modern institution. Of particular importance during this period are changes to clergy selection and training, *Faith in the City* which made recommendations concerning the needs of urban priority areas (Archbishops' Commission on Urban Priority Areas, 1985), and the years 1990 to 2000 which were declared to be a 'Decade of Evangelism', during which the Church was encouraged to prioritise evangelism. The chapter will then look at two significant developments since 1990. First, these years saw a huge growth in discipleship courses specifically targeted at those seeking to discover more about Church and faith. This was spearheaded by the *Alpha* course which originated at Holy Trinity, Brompton Road. Second, *Mission Shaped Church* will be considered (Archbishops' Council, 2004). This report

encouraged engagement with church planting and so-called ‘fresh expressions of church’.

Although to some extent adult religious learning in the Church of England had a low profile until the introduction of discipleship courses in the 1990s, two developments should be noted. First, from the 1950s onwards, there was a movement towards the use of small groups. Southcott used regular parish meetings to grow a sense of togetherness amongst his congregation in Halton and to discern how best to engage with the community (Southcott, 1958:45ff). This was developed through the practice of Christian ‘cells’ and house churches (ibid:58ff). The 1950s and 1960s saw the use of ‘T’ groups and ‘King’s Labs’ which brought groups together to engage with theology in an exploratory rather prescriptive way, valuing life experience and emphasising a complementary nature to the relationship between clergy and laity (Craig, 2006:29-30). Similarly, the charismatic movement used the small group as an important locus for learning and the ‘Parish and People’ movement encouraged parishes to meet to worship and learn together. Another such group is described in *Power to the Powerless* (Green, 1987). Green formed a small group in a church in Birmingham to reflect on the nature of Jesus’ parables and their relationship with the church’s context. This led to the foundation of a Community Advice Centre and an ongoing process of reflection-in-action (ibid:65ff).

The second development was an awareness of the need for a more varied understanding of learning. Astley discusses the need for Church education to be conscious of the dialectic between tradition and experience and to strike a balance between subject-centred (classical) and learner-centred (romantic) learning (Astley, 1991:41, 53). Craig’s ‘handbook’ of adult religious education provides an overview of different pedagogies, adult learning styles and strategies, considering their advantages and disadvantages (Craig, 1994). She thereby encourages those working in the arena of adult religious education to reflect on the nature of any learning programme and to use suitable approaches. She writes, ‘the old days of going to Sunday School to receive a lump sum of learning which you had to eke out for the rest of your life are over. Education means spending a lifetime learning how to gain knowledge and use it wisely’ (ibid:1).

There were, therefore, some notably different approaches to learning over this period with a general post-war trend towards more participatory, group-based learning and a greater recognition of different pedagogies.

2.2 Church Attendance: The Influence Of Statistics

Understanding statistical trends is vital because the narrative of declining church attendance is the defining factor behind the Church of England's current strategic approach. As well as the negative headlines, the decline is causing difficulties as the practical and financial burden of maintaining parish work and ageing buildings is falling on an ever-dwindling and ageing number of people. It also highlights how the Church's sphere of political and social influence is diminishing in parallel to its numerical decline. The leadership of the Church of England considers the reversal of this trend to be a top priority and this has provided the impetus for the series of initiatives within the recently-established *Renewal and Reform* programme. *Renewal and Reform* seeks to transform many aspects of the Church of England from its structures to its ministry in order to focus on increasing the size of its congregations and will be discussed in depth in the following chapter.

It is well known that the Church of England has experienced substantial decline in church attendance for several decades. Analysis from the Church of England's Research and Statistics Unit shows how this decline continues to be steady and significant and that there is little statistical evidence to suggest that this trend will be reversed imminently. The latest report at the time of writing shows that average weekly church attendance in 2015 was 961,000, a decrease of 11% over the decade since 2005 (Church of England Research and Statistics, 2016:15). This figure is consistent with the trend shown in earlier reports – a decrease of around 10% every ten years. The usual Sunday attendance, which excludes midweek services and is consequently lower, decreased by 14% over the same period. Attendance at Christmas and Easter services tends to be more sporadic but also decreased by 14% and 13% respectively (ibid:15). The number of church marriages, baptisms and funeral fell similarly (ibid:13). This leads the

authors to observe that most key measures of attendance have fallen between 10% and 15% since 2005. The average weekly attendance figure of 961,000 is equivalent to only 1.7% of the UK population attending a Church of England church in October 2015, the month in which statistics are gathered (ibid:29). In an attempt to salvage some good news, the report's authors point out that the numerical decline is not consistent across every parish. Whilst 37% of parishes did report a decrease in attendance, 10% reported an increase and in the remaining 53% of parishes there was no significant change (ibid:3).

These statistics show that there can be no doubt about either the reality of the downward trend or that it has been continuing for some time. Churches have been required to report their usual Sunday attendance since the mid-1960s. This figure reported as a percentage of total UK population has more than halved since these figures were first reported (ibid:16). Christmas and Easter communicants as well as electoral roll membership have also seen substantial and consistent decline since the 1960s. The authors write, 'the fact that fewer people participate in the activities of the Church of England today than have done in the past will not come as a surprise to anyone who has observed trends in church attendance over recent decades' (ibid:7). This decline is likely to accelerate in the coming decades with an ageing profile of church attendance (30% of attendees are aged seventy and above). The desire to reverse this decline within a period of a few years is extremely ambitious.

It is worth recognising that this picture of decline in attendance is not peculiar to the Church of England. Other Christian denominations have shown significant decline over the same period. Church attendance across the most important Christian denominations throughout Great Britain show total church attendance dwindling to 5% of the population in 2015 from 11.8% in 1980 (British Religion in Numbers, 2016). This is also reflected in the 2011 national census which showed a large reduction in those reporting to be Christian to 59.3% from 71.7% in 2001 along with an increase in those reporting no religion to 25.1% from 14.8% in 2001 (Office of National Statistics, 2012). This shows that there is a move away not just from the Church of England but from Christianity as a whole. As church observers like to point out, however, the percentage of those reporting to be

Christian remains nearly 60%, even if only a very small proportion of these attend church on a regular basis.

The way in which the Church responds to this decline is a significant challenge. The reasons for the decline are extremely complex and challenging to diagnose.⁴ Nevertheless, the decline is undoubtedly having a substantial impact on how individual parishes are managed from a practical perspective. As long as this decline continues, it will become increasingly difficult to maintain the current proliferation of parishes and it also raises some pertinent questions about how the Church's ministry should be structured in the future. The Church has to find a constructive response to make sure that it can operate effectively in the future. In this discussion about parish-based adult education and in the context of the national church seeking to turn around the downward trend in attendance, the question of how church membership is defined is key. The desire to increase numbers is not unhealthy in itself but the way in which it is approached needs careful theological and ecclesiological consideration. As the Church attempts to draw more people through the doors of its buildings into acts of worship, it needs to reflect on the type of membership it is trying to achieve. Is it looking to create a 'hard' membership that has clearly defined boundaries concerning aspects of liturgy and doctrine? Such a membership would have much in common with Hull's discussion of henotheistic communities. This would be a community interested primarily in the preservation of the Church of England as an institution that divides the world into members and non-members. Or is it looking to create a 'soft' membership that places less importance on adherence to rules, regulations and expectations? This would be a community that is far more open to the world around it and its potential for transformation. These two approaches fundamentally affect the way in which learning is understood. The closed community of the membership-based church would be concerned with defining religious community as opposed to the world and society around it. Keen to

⁴Ian Jones explores the impact on the Church in Birmingham of post-war social changes. His discussion involves the differences in outlook and experience between different generations, an increasing influence of the state on private lives, shifting approaches to parenthood, and the privatisation of social life at the expense of neighbourhood, community and Church (Jones, 2012).

preserve its particular identity it would prefer an authoritarian style of direct learning through which it would control and transmit the parameters of membership. The more open Church would be less concerned with maintaining boundaries and identity and more open to change as it evolves in response to a changing world and society. This encourages a more collaborative approach to learning.

2.3 Towards The Conversion Of England

Responses to low church attendance in the twentieth century were never far from the Church's conscience. The 1945 report *Towards the Conversion of England*, commissioned by Archbishops Temple of Canterbury and Garbett of York, sought to bring evangelism to the fore in a bid to grow numbers in the pews (Archbishops' Commission on Evangelism, 1945). Temple died in 1944 and although the report was still published, the recommendations of *Towards the Conversion of England* were not implemented under his successor, Archbishop Fisher. The report, however, has not been forgotten. There has been a revival of interest in recent discussions regarding *Renewal and Reform*. The General Synod paper which established the foundations for the Archbishops' task group on evangelism refers to the 1945 report. It values *Towards the Conversion of England's* emphasis on evangelism and its desire to involve the whole church, describing it as 'far sighted yet at the time not carried forward' (General Synod, 2013b:8). The present Archbishop of Canterbury referred to it in his address to General Synod in February 2015 and his later Lambeth Lecture in which he refers to it as 'Archbishop Temple's great report' (Welby, 2015). This rediscovery suggests that *Towards the Conversion of England* exercises an important influence over the current *Renewal and Reform* initiatives.

Mirroring Astley's later concerns about the alienation of people from the Church by the clerical and academic hierarchy, the opening paragraphs of *Towards the Conversion of England* recognize that 'there can be no doubt that there is a wide and deep gulf between the Church and the people' and that 'it is indisputable that only a small percentage of the nation today joins regularly in public worship of

any kind' (Archbishops' Commission on Evangelism, 1945:2-3). Whilst the report estimates that 10-15% of the population are 'closely linked' to a church (a substantially higher figure than today), these concerns about an institution whose numbers and influence are decreasing are strikingly similar to those of today's Church leadership. The report's authors set out their challenge to the Church to 'present the Christian Gospel to multitudes in every section of society who believe in nothing; who have lost a whole dimension (the spiritual dimension) of life; and for whom life has no ultimate meaning' (ibid:16). The report assumes that there are vast swathes of the population who are no longer even loosely connected to either the local or the national Church. The report's response is to call the Church to establish evangelism as its main priority and to focus on a predominantly 'evangelistic ministry' (ibid:41ff). It sets out a programme whose aim is to reverse the already declining fortunes of the Church of England.

What does this evangelistic ministry consist of? First, although fewer people attend church, it believes that services have the potential to 'confront even the casual visitor with the presence of God' (ibid:42). Alongside the continuation of current services, it encourages more informal worship and teaching about liturgy. This acknowledges that the experience of worship contains an implicit learning opportunity. Looking forward to Grierson, participation in the worshipping life of a church is a central part of the learning process because it is also the centre of its identity. Second, the report calls for every sermon to be seen as evangelistic because it can challenge the hearer. It encourages occasional post-service discussion groups which are, the report claims, particularly effective for young people because it prevents them seeing the pulpit as a 'coward's castle' – a place that rises above criticism (ibid:43). Drawing a possible comparison to ordinary theology, this is an attempt to involve people in theological discussion, allowing them to voice their own questions, concerns and opinions. Third, the report encourages clergy to visit parishioners with the expectation that an evangelistic opportunity might arise rather than seeing such visits as purely social. Fourth, it values the occasional offices as unique chances to meet people and discuss faith. The report holds confirmation, when understood as a true commitment to faith, and marriage, especially marriage preparation, in high regard because they present opportunities for discussion. It is notable that these four characteristics

of evangelistic ministry are concerned with bringing an explicitly evangelistic mind-set to parts of ministry that already exist. This is evolution rather than revolution. Even though the report proposes some new approaches, its evangelistic emphasis points to an increasingly one-dimensional ministry.

The report is critical of the ability of clergy to engage with this evangelistic focus. It believes that clergy training has been concerned with pastoral matters and highlights the perceived failure of the Church to train clergy adequately to deal with evangelistic opportunities that might arise through their own preaching and enquirers' questions. It eloquently suggests that many clergy are 'embarrassed and tongue-tied when the occasion offers itself of speaking to individuals about the deepest matters of their ethical welfare' (ibid:45). It proposes a revision of clergy training to ensure improvements in prayer life, knowledge and use of the Bible, the art of preaching and understanding of human personality. This is further evidence of the reorientation of ministry towards one-dimensional evangelistic concerns.

The answer presented by *Towards the Conversion of England*, however, does not lie just in a re-assessment of clergy training. The report identifies that clergy cannot undertake this evangelistic ministry alone. One of the report's major themes is the need for the whole of the Church, clergy and laity, to work together in a common evangelistic ministry. The authors write that, 'clergy and people, waiting upon God, must plan together, and work together, to recover in practice the Apostolate of the whole Church, and thus to fashion the Church itself into Christ's weapon for evangelism' (ibid:40). This calls for a re-envisioning of the place of clergy and laity in which the laity shoulder a substantial part of this burden of evangelism. A programme of lay education and development is proposed to equip laity for their new evangelistic role, ranging from locally-based evangelistic cells and parish conventions for teaching about faith, prayer and the spiritual life, to national schools for evangelistic leaders and correspondence courses. This is a comprehensive evangelistic reorientation of the whole Church.

The involvement of laity has the added advantage of bridging the gap between clergy and laity. The authors write, 'the non-worshipping members of the

community are not impressed by a message based on the authority of the Church unless it is supported by the first-hand testimony of that message' (ibid:53). This implies that the involvement and witness of the laity is key to making the Church's message relevant. Direct communication from the Church is not sufficient unless connections are made to the lives of others. This falls short of saying that experience is a key factor in learning but there is recognition that direct proclamation is not ideal. Education is clearly seen by the authors as important for the successful enabling of the laity not just in the context of preparing people for a ministry of evangelism but also in more general terms. They see the laity as an untapped resource for evangelism, although the gulf between them and the clergy has until now been a barrier to their involvement. They write about a hesitancy amongst the laity to talk openly about their faith. They believe that this has always been put down to English reserve but 'it arises from a notion, on the part of the would-be evangelist, that he has not the right to speak, since he lacks the assurance of faith which he would fain possess but cannot feel' (ibid:53). There is a latent theological wisdom amongst the laity that would benefit the whole Church if it could be unlocked. An earlier report by Sir Richard Livingstone (Livingstone, 1944) is quoted which suggests that one of the key problems with adults in churches is that their religious learning stops as they approach adulthood yet this is precisely the moment when their interest is at its most stimulated (Archbishops' Commission on Evangelism, 1945:130-1). This hesitancy towards expressing faith along with the suggestion that religious learning stops at a relatively early age looks forward to Jeff Astley's theory of ordinary theology and the psychological problems of faith development identified by John Hull. This aspect of *Towards the Conversion of England* is remarkably before its time because it shows sensitivity towards these issues.

This can also be said of some of the other elements of the report, including in what is described as 'the chief problem of evangelism'. Whilst the principal content of the Gospel is described as unchanging, the authors believe that the way in which it is presented must vary in order to be effective. They write that 'this calls for a presentation expressed in terms and images consonant with present-day thinking and experience' (ibid:17). Even though this contradicts the report's later commitment to teach the Church's doctrines rigidly, it indicates that

context should be considered. The Gospel can have no meaning unless it is seen to be relevant to the lives of those who hear it. This leads to the proposal that churches should have dedicated programmes of learning for adults beyond evangelistic training. It evokes Grainger's future concern with groupwork because, despite the desire for grand teaching conventions, the authors also value the informal environment of the discussion group. Although this is still seen to complement the more direct methods of preaching and lecturing, 'properly conducted it is Socratic in its operation, and its efficiency may be judged by the degree in which the talking is done, not by the leader but by all the members of the group. Its aim is to encourage thinking, rather than to impart information' (ibid:130). This indicates a pedagogy that encourages a move away from direct learning towards a greater involvement of participants. The report advocates the use of 'study circles' in which church members can learn and explore faith, as well as lay-led 'Christian cells'. The seeds of the small group approach to Christian learning are sown, pointing towards the development in the coming decades of Southcott's home churches, process evangelisation and home groups as well as the possibility of a more open and questioning approach to faith. A final way in which the report is forward-looking is that Christian learning does not occur in isolation and 'groups for the study of the Christian faith should develop into groups that put the principles of faith into action. Such common action will take two forms: evangelistic and social. There will be the evangelistic presentation of faith to individuals and there will be the social application of faith to the contemporary situation' (ibid:132). The purpose of Christian education other than the need to create evangelists is to help people use their learning in practice. Christianity becomes the framework within which people interpret what they believe not just intellectually but also in the actions of their entirety of their lives.

Despite these hints at a different understanding of learning, the report retains a predominantly conservative bias. It must not be forgotten that it was published over seventy years ago in a social and cultural climate that had not yet undergone the significant changes of the coming decades. Much of the report presents a conservative view of evangelism focused on conversion. It argues that in prior times, conversions were rare because the overwhelming majority of the

population was brought up in the Christian faith with the Church of England as part of the fabric of society. There was no need to convert those whose faith was an inherent part of their culture and context.⁵ Conversion used to be associated with those who dramatically changed Christian denomination or had lived lives of ill repute and had experienced redemption. The report believes that this view has changed due to the growing distance between Church and people (ibid:16). Its new understanding of conversion is that dramatic action is required to bring those who had become distanced from Church back to a life of faith. This conversion is to be achieved through allowing people to gain personal knowledge of Christ. A significant source of this personal knowledge would be the testimony and witness of others (ibid:37). Conversion occurs in two stages. First, interest is aroused and questions are answered before second, somebody is brought to a moment of decision and commitment to follow Christ (ibid:38). There is a recognition that conversion is not always a sudden experience and is just as likely to be gradual (ibid:36). Sudden or gradual, however, the report's underlying understanding of evangelism is that there is a need to bring a person out of one state of being into another and that the new way of being is better than the former. This plays into an understanding of church membership with hard boundaries between church and world. People come to faith because they have been acted upon by the church's evangelistic process, be that its educational undertaking or the witness of others. This evangelistic process provides the subjective knowledge from which individuals become Christian.

This is further supported by the report's conservative approach to doctrine which it places at the centre of evangelism:

It is true that there can be teaching of doctrine without evangelism but there can be no true evangelism without those fundamental doctrines which are the content of the Good News. (ibid:66)

⁵ See the socialization/enculturation theories of Westerhoff (2012) and Foster (2012). It should be noted that Westerhoff explicitly expresses the need for conversion as well as nurture (2012:25ff).

The proclamation of dogma is seen to be one of the most important aspects of bringing people to conversion. Teaching conventions are presented as a vital component of parish missions because they are a way to teach the constructs of faith to the people. They are described as ‘a coming together of the people of a parish to receive consecutive instruction in the essential truths and practices of the Christian religion’ (ibid:75). The dominant pedagogy proposed here appears to be at the uncritical extreme of direct learning and the language calls to mind Freire’s ‘banking education’. The authors of the report bemoan the lack of systematic teaching in parishes. Despite suggestions that they might support a different approach to learning, their language clearly demonstrates their belief that systematic teaching of the dogmatic constructs of faith is a vital foundation for an individual’s journey towards conversion.

Towards the Conversion of England pre-empted some of the ideas outlined in Chapter 1, especially regarding group learning, the importance of context, and lay theology. For the most part, however, the report is based on a traditional and conservative approach to evangelism. Many of its themes will be seen to recur in the *Renewal and Reform* programme. There are distinct parallels in the way they both answer questions of resourcing ministry, enabling laity and understanding the nature of conversion and evangelism of the church in the present-day social climate.

2.4 1945-2000: From *Towards The Conversion Of England* To The Decade Of Evangelism

2.4.1 Overview

The period from the end of the Second World War to the new millennium saw significant social change. There was the increasing prosperity of the 1950s, the revolution in sexual and social attitudes of the 1960s, the economic challenges of the 1970s, and the surge of capitalism and the dominance of the markets in the 1980s and 1990s. During this time, the Church of England had five Archbishops of Canterbury (Fisher, Ramsey, Coggan, Runcie and Carey) who oversaw some substantial changes and initiatives. The first decades of this

period were witness to a time of growing dominance of the Church Commissioners, whose main task was to bring together and oversee the major costs of clergy – stipends, housing and pensions. Some astute investments brought a period of financial prosperity but this eventually came to an end with over-exposure to property investment at the time of the property slump of the early 1990s, leading to the loss of hundreds of millions. As assets dramatically decreased and pensions liability increased, this led to some serious financially-led questions regarding clergy employment and cutbacks as well as the organisational independence of the Church Commissioners. The Church of England's governance structures were later reformed. Another significant change occurred in 1970 when General Synod replaced the Church Assembly and united the governance of the provinces of York and Canterbury. Although the convocations of York and Canterbury continue to exist, General Synod effectively controlled much of the Church's decision-making process. This centralisation continued with the establishment of the Archbishops' Council in 1999 during the primacy of George Carey. The Archbishops' Council 'provides within the Church of England a focus for leadership and executive responsibility and a forum for strategic thinking and planning' (www.churchofengland.org, 'Archbishop's Council'). It is meant to act as a central body to oversee the business of the Church's numerous organisational bodies, including General Synod and the Church Commissioners, and was in part a response to the financial crisis earlier in the decade. The post-war years also saw substantial liturgical changes. In 1945, the Church's liturgy was still based on the Book of Common Prayer but a series of reviews and trials of different liturgies led to the introduction of the Alternative Service Book in 1980. This in turn led to the development of *Common Worship*, introduced in 2000. A further critical change was General Synod's 1992 vote paving the way for the first ordinations of women as priests in 1994. Overall, many of these reforms were focused on the structure and governance of the church. They served to build up the Church of England as a national institution and many of its actions over these decades were internally focused. Even the decision to accept the ordination of women was centred on the internal debate between different factions. The increasing centralisation of power and decision making is one of the key themes of this

period. The Church chose to focus predominantly inwardly on its institutional needs rather than outwardly on engaging with changes in culture and society.

There are limited records of learning within churches in this period. Whilst there was some development towards smaller, participatory groups (evidenced by the work of Southcott, 'T' groups, and Green mentioned above), it might be assumed that most educational efforts were focused on the traditional aspects of preparation for confirmation and marriage as well as occasional parochial events. Equally, despite the evangelistic position of *Towards the Conversion of England* and its recognition of increased distance between Church and people, no sustained attempts were made to bridge this gap. The Church continued to rely on its position as the national, established church. There are, however, three areas that will be looked at in more detail that provide some perspective on this period. First, the training and selection of ordinands evolved significantly in the decades after the Second World War and this tells us much of both the moves to increase centralisation and the expectations of clergy in their work in the parish. Second, the publication of *Faith in the City* in 1985 was an attempt by the Church of England to provoke national dialogue regarding its own ministry in urban priority areas and the impact of government policy. Third, the 1990s were declared to be the 'Decade of Evangelism' during which the Church was to engage more people in the life of the Church and equip its parishes to prioritise evangelism.

2.4.2 Selection And Training For Ordained Ministry

One of the major changes to training in the post-war period was the introduction of a rigorous selection process for candidates for ordination. Selection for training had hitherto been a haphazard process with diocesan bishops making their own decisions which led to a variety of different practices (Reiss, 2013:33-40). Graduates could present themselves directly to their bishop for recommendation whilst non-graduates attended the theological colleges that were founded throughout the nineteenth century. Those who could fund their training themselves were not subject to any form of interview other than that of a theological college principal. The Universities Preliminary Examination (U.P.E.)

was introduced in 1874 to provide a common standard (ibid:61-68). It examined various aspects of academic theology but some diocesan bishops required supplementary tests whilst others did not accept it at all. In 1912, the Central Advisory Council of Training (CACoT) was established to oversee the selection and training of candidates for ministry and advise the bishops on how this might best be achieved (ibid:24-53). This led to the Archbishops' Commission on Training which operated from 1937-1944 (ibid:120-138). The Commission considered issues of curriculum, post-ordination training, and selection. Its principal recommendations were that all prospective ordinands should be subject to some form of national selection process, thereby curtailing the power of bishops and college principals, and that all selected ordinands should undertake a longer period of training. National selection centres were set up based on the recruitment methods of the War Office (ibid:131-161). Candidates were required to attend a selection centre for several days during which their suitability for ordination would be assessed through not only interviews and examination results but also through the way in which they interacted with others during the process. The centres made recommendations for selection for training to diocesan bishops with whom the final decision rested.

These selection centres became an established part of the vocations process during the post-war years under Archbishop Fisher (ibid:163-167). Despite major changes to the training facilities for ordinands in the 1970s, the basic structure of the selection process remains broadly unchanged today (ibid:234-256). CACoT has gone through different names and is currently known as the Ministry Division (MinDiv). Over the decades, it has assumed more responsibility and now controls the selection, training and financing of training for ordination across the Church of England. Whilst the ultimate decision for selection and training still rested with the bishops, as with other aspects of the Church's governance and structures, CACoT and its successors effectively centralised the decision-making process for the training and selection of ordinands. Reiss writes, 'a diocesan bishop in consultation with his diocese also still had ultimate responsibility for the organisation of ministry in his diocese, but it would take a very courageous bishop to ignore completely the general policy of CACTM on issues relating to the ministry' (ibid:205). This illustrates the general move towards centralisation.

Decision-making was being moved away from the local contexts of dioceses and power was being concentrated on Church House, strengthening institutional structures.

Regarding candidates, eight criteria for selection were introduced in 1993 to aid assessment:

1. Familiarity with **Ministry within the Church of England**;
2. An ability to speak of their own sense of **Vocation**;
3. An understanding of and ability to express their **Christian Faith** and desire to further knowledge;
4. A commitment to **Spirituality**;
5. Sufficient maturity of **Personality and Character**;
6. Self-awareness of **Relationships** and respect of the Church's position on sexual morality;
7. Ability to demonstrate **Leadership and Collaboration**;
8. **Quality of Mind** that shows sufficient capacity to undertake a programme of theological and ministerial study. (ibid:354)

It is noticeable that none of these original criteria directly refer to candidates' awareness of learning in churches, their potential to teach, or mission and evangelism which has recently become such a major focus for the national church. They are primarily concerned with individual qualities. This, however, was changed in 2014 when a ninth criterion of Mission and Evangelism was added (Ministry Division, 2014a). These criteria have subsequently been developed into a detailed chart showing what candidates are expected to be capable of at various stages in their ministry from selection to first incumbency (Ministry Division, 2014b). Whilst the importance of learning might be inferred, there is still no standalone criterion that is specifically concerned with how clergy understand the learning process in churches. The issue at the centre of this thesis is how to create parishes that place learning at the centre of their activities, encouraging their members to be critically reflective Christians whose faith and action respond to the needs of the world around them. If this is to happen, it will require leaders, ordained and lay, who are equipped to enable it. This highlights that, whilst the central oversight of selection and training has many strengths and

has brought consistency to a previously chaotic system, the creation of increasingly precise selection criteria tightly controls the selection of candidates. If the degree of central control is taken further and the selection criteria are made more stringent, there is the risk that the Church's ministry will become overly narrow and its focus confined to the delivery of top-down national strategy rather than being sufficiently flexible to respond to local needs and learning opportunities.

A brief mention needs to be given to clergy numbers because a substantial increase in recruitment to ordained ministry is seem to be of central importance to its growth. In 1900, there were over 25,000 clergy in the Church of England (Reiss, 2013:1). By 2000, this figure had reduced to 12,000, a sixth of whom were non-stipendiary – a category of ministry that did not exist a century earlier. The number of annual ordinations fluctuated over the twentieth century (ibid:357-9). It stood at 650 in 1900 and 159 in 1945 (a figure driven by the effect of the Second World War). There were 569 ordinations in 2000. This was the highest figure since 1966 but it is worth noting that whilst 313 were ordinations to stipendiary ministry, the remainder were ordinations to non-stipendiary or ordained local ministry (ibid:357-9). Although this figure varies considerably, there has been a general downward trend in ordinations over the twentieth century. Added to the fact that a disproportionate number of clergy are approaching retirement, the Church is facing a significant imbalance between ordinations and retirements in the coming years. This will undoubtedly have an impact on the way in which clergy are able to lead parishes in the coming decades. The way in which the Church responds to this is just as important as the way in which it responds to the decline in attendance. The need for a laity who are enabled both practically and theologically, as highlighted in *Towards the Conversion of England*, is becoming increasingly necessary.

2.4.3 Faith In The City

Much of the narrative of the Church of England in the second half of the twentieth century is of increasing centralization and a degree of introspection as it focused on many internal issues from the reform of canon law to the ordination of women.

This introspection was balanced, however, by a number of local and national efforts to be outward focussed and to engage with social issues. *Faith in the City*, the report of the Archbishops' Commission on Urban Priority Areas (ACUPA), is arguably the highest profile example of such work (Archbishops' Commission on Urban Priority Areas, 1985). It was influenced by the tradition of William Temple, who believed that the Church should participate in discussion of social issues and public policy and offer guidelines for government known as 'middle axioms' (Clark, 1993:19). *Faith in the City* emphasised the importance of community, stressed principles of justice and compassion and considered the position of the poor to be central to national wellbeing (Filby, 2015:3331/8322). With its bias to the poor, the report has also been linked to South American liberation theology, although the effectiveness of this claim has been questioned (Brown, 2014:9-12). The report aimed to examine the challenges of urban priority areas (UPAs) and to identify the Church's response through its mission and ministry. It engaged with the needs of UPAs, criticised the policies and approaches of Church and government, and positioned the Church as key player in a national conversation.

Following the Temple tradition, ACUPA adopted the style of a Royal Commission, gathering evidence from key political, economic, and social voices and made recommendations to Church and State (Clark, 1993:81 and Brown, 2014:6). *Faith in the City's* thirty-eight recommendations to the Church addressed the inadequacy of training for ministry in UPAs, the development of local ordained ministry, ethnic concerns, the cultural gap between the Church and those living in UPAs, and the Church's social responsibility (ACUPA, 1985:361-4). This led to the creation of the Church Urban Fund (CUF) which brought substantial investment to faith-related projects in UPAs and raised the Church's profile within them. *Faith in the City* has had a significant effect on Church practice and CUF still operates today. Filby remarks that it led to the Church's enduring revival in UPAs (Filby, 2015:3331/8322). There was, however, considerable controversy surrounding the report which centred on its twenty-three recommendations to the government (ACUPA, 1985:364-6). *Faith in the City* was seen to be highly critical of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government (Filby, 2015:3358/8322ff). It highlighted the government's failure to engage in issues of urban regeneration which were linked to the steep decline in industry during this period along with

the associated problems of unemployment. It criticised housing, education and welfare policies. There was a visceral response from members of the government to the report. The perceived interference of the Church in the affairs of the state ensured that *Faith in the City* was headline news, thereby giving it a particularly high profile.

The importance of *Faith in the City* to this thesis is that it was a report that was not concerned with conversion, growing numbers in church pews, or points of doctrine. It was not pre-occupied with the Church's own internal structural issues of governance or financial management. Its recommendations have been criticised as being no more than a restatement of post-war welfare policy (Filby, 2015:3319/8322). Nevertheless, *Faith in the City* is a prominent example from the twentieth century of how the Church made a concerted effort to look beyond its own institutional needs to the social needs of those who lived in its poorest parishes, using the content of its faith and its unique position in society to critique contemporary issues, bring about dialogue, and affect change. *Faith in the City* raised the profile of the Church by bringing it into conversation with contemporary social issues. It also had an ongoing effect on much of the Church's own practice, especially through the establishment of CUF.

Faith in the City was not a specific attempt to educate. It was, however, an attempt by the Church to learn from its own experience of its work in UPAs and to reflect on ways in which this work might be improved. The high profile that it gained in the national press shows how the Church can be effective when it engages with issues beyond its church buildings and internal politics. It is important for the Church to strike a balance between its internal concerns and its place as a potentially influential critic of national policy. Returning to Hull's discussion of different types of church community, *Faith in the City* shows how the Church can adopt a more monotheistic, all-encompassing attitude to faith as opposed to building the impregnable boundaries of henotheism. It also highlights the importance of the local as opposed to the national. Although it was a national report, *Faith in the City* encourages UPA parishes to reflect on the unique needs of their communities by developing initiatives such as local ordained ministry and local lay partnerships as well as encouraging community participation in how

church buildings might best be used. The importance of understanding the local context is key both to Astley's ordinary theology and also Grierson's emphasis on understanding congregations. The Church can be more effective through seeking to provide local responses to local situations rather than national initiatives. To find such local responses should be one of the key tasks of adult religious learning.

2.4.4 The Decade Of Evangelism

Resolution 43 of the 1988 Lambeth Conference called members of the Anglican Communion to a 'decade of evangelism'. Seeing evangelism as the primary task of the church, it encouraged the provinces of the Anglican Communion to work with other Christian denominations during the final decade of the millennium 'with a renewed and united emphasis on making Christ known to the people of his world' (www.anglicancommunion.org, 'Resolution 43 Decade of Evangelism'). Although this resolution was made whilst Robert Runcie was still Archbishop of Canterbury, it fell to George Carey, who succeeded him in 1991, to bring this initiative to fruition. This was, in name at least, a major initiative to communicate the message of Christianity to a new generation and to bring the Church together in a common objective. It was also a response to the decline in church attendance that had already been taking place for some decades and the first major Church of England initiative in evangelism since *Towards the Conversion of England* in 1945.⁶ It sought to engage with those who had become distanced from the Church. In 1992, Archbishop Carey launched the 'Springboard' team whose task was to be the central point for the coordination of the new evangelistic efforts and to communicate them to dioceses and parishes. Springboard's aim was also to equip parishes to welcome an influx of new people into their parishes.

Although expectations were high, it is widely accepted that the Decade of Evangelism did not bring the success that was hoped for. Far from bringing the expected new generation into church pews, the statistics show a continued

⁶ The multi-denominational National Initiative in Evangelism was launched in the late 1970s but failed to gain sufficient traction and was wound up in the early 1980s.

decline in attendance between 1990 and 2000. With the exception of the Diocese of London, the Dioceses of the Church of England at the turn of the millennium found themselves in a numerically weaker position than they had been a decade earlier (Francis and Roberts, 2009). Commenting on the initiative's effectiveness, Bob Jackson, who has written extensively on church growth, suggests that dioceses paid little meaningful attention to the scheme and that guidance, policy and strategy were sparse. Damning the project, he writes, 'simply calling the 1990s the Decade of Evangelism did not turn them into a decade of evangelism' (Jackson, 2002:46). The project was not backed up by the practical initiatives needed for it to be successful and it failed to inspire dioceses or parishes. In reality, the Decade of Evangelism was eclipsed by other events which moved the attention of the Archbishop and Church leadership elsewhere, in particular towards inward-looking projects. The Church Commissioners' losses through over-exposure to property investment grabbed the headlines and plunged the Church into a financial crisis. This was in part responsible for the report *Working as One Body* which eventually led to the formation of the Archbishops' Council in 1998 (Church of England, 1995). More than anything else, however, the 1990s were dominated by the Church's internal debates that led to the General Synod vote to ordain women priests in 1992, the first ordinations of women in 1994, and the fallout from these decisions. The Decade of Evangelism might have been under supported but the focus and energy of the Church and its members were elsewhere.

The Decade of Evangelism may have been an unremarkable and ineffectual event in the Church of England's history but it remains important because it shows the moment when its focus and language began to change. The Church continued to engage with social issues through reports such as *Unemployment and the Future of Work* (Council of Churches in Britain and Ireland, 1997). Its efforts, however, have been neither as high profile as *Faith in the City* nor have they enjoyed the same level of media coverage. Partly driven by the marginalisation of faith, there has been a move away from the Temple tradition's authoritative, establishment 'royal commission' style of report which was not necessarily dependent on Christian tradition (Brown, 2014:75). As the decline in attendance became increasingly marked and harder to ignore, the Church's

language began to be dominated increasingly by the terms 'mission' and 'evangelism'. Whilst evangelism was needed to address numerical growth, mission came to be understood as a term that unites proclamation of the Christian message with the Church's prophetic actions. Influenced by Hauerwas' idea of the Church as a social ethic, there was a return to seeing Christian tradition as the foundation for social action (ibid:80-3; Hauerwas, 1981). This countered what was seen by some as a needless distinction between Christian proclamation and liberal approaches to social action whose explicit connections to faith were tenuous. Some consider this to be a positive move which has returned the Church to what it perceives to be its fundamental aim of bringing more people to commit to faith and places proclamation at the centre of its task. Yet this might be seen as a narrowing of not only its language but also the scope of its work. It might risk the Church becoming increasingly congregational, with too great an emphasis on proclamation.

2.5 The Growth Of Discipleship Courses

The 1990s saw the development of published discipleship courses, often referred to as process evangelism, which have since grown to dominate religious learning in churches. The best known of these courses is *Alpha* which originated at Holy Trinity, Brompton in the early 1990s and grew rapidly. Alpha's marketing has been hugely successful at raising the course's profile and its website claims that 'over 29 million people have tried *Alpha* in 169 countries, and it has been translated into 112 different languages' (www.alpha.org, 'Our Story'). *Alpha*'s spread is not only down to marketing. Consisting of fifteen talks spread over ten sessions (including a weekend away), it is made easy to implement for time-limited parishes and their clergy. It uses prescriptive and prepared material, offers training to course leaders, follows a set, easy-to-follow pattern, involves many parishioners through preparing meals and other practicalities, and has an established reputation. From the point of view of those who attend, it adopts an accessible and purportedly non-confrontational approach with sessions which are built around a meal alongside a video or live talk with subsequent discussion.

Whilst there is no doubt that *Alpha* has been extremely influential on parish approaches to learning in recent years, its high profile has opened it to significant criticism. One of the major criticisms of *Alpha* is that it leads to the 'McDonaldization' of religion (Ward, 1998; Drane, 2000; Hunt, 2001 and 2004). Just as McDonalds tightly controls its worldwide fast food franchises to ensure consistency, so *Alpha* also employs similar techniques. *Alpha* guarantees a consistent approach across its courses by offering a simplified 'menu' of faith, proof of success through statistics and a predictable, familiar environment. This is achieved through tight control from the centre. The *Alpha* brand is recognisable and trustworthy. This is typified by the Alpha logo – a familiar figure carrying a question mark that is regularly seen outside churches and on billboards. The cartoonish logo can be understood to present a non-threatening approach to religion. If the video talks are not used, *Questions of Life* provides the scripts (Gumbel, 2011). Another volume, *Searching Issues*, predicts questions that are likely to arise and proposes suitable answers (Gumbel, 2013). The content is closely controlled in an attempt to ensure that every *Alpha* course will have the same content and delivery as well as a similar feel regardless of location, context and leadership. This is emphasised by a restrictive copyright statement which makes it challenging for parishes to adapt the programme substantially for their context, although it is inevitable that some adaptation takes place.

Alpha has been further criticised for oversimplification and a narrow approach to theology. It contains no mention of the Trinity and sacraments and has a controversial focus on the Holy Spirit, which takes up three of the fifteen talks and dominates the weekend away. *Alpha* is presented as an introductory course to the basics of Christian faith and belief. As such, *Alpha* claims a certain level of authority. Yet those who have written the course have made decisions to reject some aspects of faith and to emphasise others. The content of the course is theologically loyal to its charismatic evangelical origins at Holy Trinity, Brompton Road. Although it claims to reflect the principal points of Christianity, the content of the most widely-used discipleship course in the Church of England is restricted to the theological position of one of its traditions. Other traditions and contexts would have a different view of these principle points. *Alpha's* presentation of the 'Christian basics', therefore, should not be taken uncritically. As has been seen

in the discussion of Grierson in the previous chapter, attempts to impose an outside point of view that does not engage with context is likely to have limited success.

The material success of *Alpha* cannot be denied, but these criticisms raise important issues for parish learning. The simplified and prescriptive *Alpha* theology is the opposite of ordinary theology which suggests that belief is far more complex and closely associated with personal experience. Although space for discussion is integral to each session, the anticipation of questions and proposals for answers suggest that its pedagogy is rooted in direct learning. The reality of parish practice does vary but where the course is followed uncritically, it is possible that learning might favour Freire's extreme banking approach. The rigid nature of *Alpha*'s content and the inflexibility of its copyright also show how difficult it is to adapt the material to different contexts. One of the most significant criticisms of *Alpha* is that the course is targeted primarily at a young, middle-class audience, reflecting the demographics of its home church of Holy Trinity, Brompton (Booker and Ireland, 2005:22; Hunt, 2004:15ff). It is very challenging to translate this to different social and cultural contexts. This thesis argues that dialogue with specific personal, social and cultural contexts should be at the centre of any approach to parish-based religious learning. These criticisms suggest that *Alpha* might fall short of achieving this.

The 1990s also saw the publication of the *Emmaus* course, developed by Steven Croft, Steven Cottrell, Felicity Lawson, and Robert Warren (Cottrell et al, 2004, 2005, 2010, 2012). Although *Emmaus* did not benefit from the financial investment and publicity of *Alpha* or its subsequent international success, it became a widely-used programme across the Church of England. The course consists of three stages. The first stage, *Contact*, is concerned with setting up the course, ensuring that parishes understand the reasons for using it, leaders and assistants are suitably prepared, and a suitable group of people are invited to attend. The second stage, *Nurture*, is a fifteen-session introduction to Christianity. In principle, the *Nurture* stage follows a similar process evangelisation methodology to *Alpha*, aiming to provide a 'Christian basics' approach to learning. The third stage, *Growth*, is designed to follow on from

Nurture and is aimed at those who consider themselves to be committed Christians. Designed to help reflection on living out faith, the nineteen sessions cover being human, overcoming evil, personal identity, and living a life for God. This contrasts to *Alpha* which acts as a standalone course.

Although parallels can be drawn between Emmaus and Alpha, there are some substantial differences. Emmaus neither insists on a particular format for the environment in which the sessions take place nor demands that users of the material stick rigidly to the structure and content. Most importantly, it employs a different learning metaphor to Alpha. The link to the disciples' encounter with Jesus on the Road to Emmaus is that the course authors equate evangelisation to a journey. The evangelistic principle behind Emmaus is that the metaphor of a journey prolongs the period of evangelism. A journey towards Christian commitment is less likely to be a single moment but a much longer process (Booker and Ireland, 2005:35ff). There are also some other important attitudes underpinning *Emmaus* that differ from *Alpha*. The course seeks to portray evangelism not as the act of being *told* something but as *personal discovery*, in which the learner is enabled to find her own way into faith. This journey of discovery is *accompanied* by more experienced members of the church whose role is to guide individuals and facilitate groups. This is reflected in the methods used within the sessions. *Emmaus* makes extensive use of 'buzz groups' in which small groups of learners are encouraged to discuss a series of questions and provide feedback to the whole group. This is an encouraging approach because it allows learners to bring their own views, experience and questions into the course. It stands in stark contrast to the much more inflexible approach of *Alpha*.⁷

⁷ *Emmaus* was superseded by the new *Pilgrim* course in 2013. *Pilgrim* similarly uses a wide range of contributors from different traditions within the Church of England, a number of whom were responsible for *Emmaus*. *Pilgrim* is divided into two stages. The 'Follow' stage is equivalent to the *Emmaus*' 'Nurture' course and is aimed at the 'Christian basics' market. The 'Grow' stage is equivalent to *Emmaus*' 'Growth' and is for those who are seeking to deepen their faith. There is a significant amount of material. Each stage offers four separate six-session courses – an overall total of forty-eight sessions. As it is a new course, *Pilgrim* has yet to be subject to critical review. Its approach, content and style, however, are very similar to those of *Emmaus*. Each session allows substantial time for

Yet despite these differences, Grainger still groups *Emmaus* with *Alpha*. Whilst *Emmaus*' attempt to involve participants in discussion about the areas being explored and its view that evangelism is a drawn-out process are to be applauded, the course is still open to many of the same criticisms as *Alpha*. *Emmaus*' subject matter is far broader than *Alpha*. It is more Trinitarian and includes material on sacraments and the Church. Yet decisions have still been made about what to include and exclude within the Christian basics. Both courses follow a very specific curriculum whose purpose is ultimately to guide participants towards a particular position. Despite *Emmaus*' attempts to take a different approach to *Alpha*, the nature of both courses is strongly didactic. Their content is tightly controlled and they start with the agenda of the Church's own needs rather than the needs and questions of those attending the courses (Booker and Ireland, 20015:35). These courses emphasise subject-centred, direct learning. Both *Alpha* and *Emmaus*, however, offer opportunities for conversation within the sessions. These are moments in which content might be explored critically through individual lives and experiences, thereby giving them greater balance through introducing a learner-centred approach. The extent to which this occurs, however, will depend on how closely leaders follow course parameters.

What strengths do *Alpha* and *Emmaus* have? It was discussed earlier that Grainger refers to how courses of process evangelism are used not just to inform new disciples. They are also extremely effective at building relationships and community amongst those who are already actively participating in parish life (see pp44-45). These secondary results that arise from participation in various elements of course delivery are examples of latent learning. People sign up to help organise the courses with the primary aim of enabling a parish's evangelism and do not necessarily expect to learn themselves. This oblique learning is an undervalued and under-studied aspect of learning in the parish context.

group discussion and the role of leaders is more as facilitator/enabler than teacher. Participants are encouraged to bring their own opinions and experience into the group discussions.

2.6 *Mission-Shaped Church*

2004 saw the publication of *Mission-Shaped Church (MSC)* (Archbishops' Council, 2004). Considered by many to be a ground-breaking report, *MSC* sought a solution to the way in which the Church of England might adapt to what the report recognises as a substantially changed culture with dramatically different attitudes to Church and faith. Beginning with *Breaking New Ground*, a report on church planting, the working group considered how it had progressed in the intervening decade (Church of England, 1994). Whilst recognising the legitimacy of church plants, the report believes that many of them had been extensions of church communities that already existed. The report, therefore, widens its scope from traditional church planting to include all ways in which parishes attempt to introduce new ways to worship which break from traditional norms. It names these 'fresh expressions of church' which are described as new forms of church that serve people who are outside church, are responses to local context, and draw people on a journey of discipleship (www.freshexpressions.org.uk, 'What Is A Fresh Expression?'). *MSC* identifies twelve ways in which they come about which range from new initiatives (e.g. café churches, network churches) to extensions of current work (e.g. schools, youth work) (2004:43ff). *MSC*'s primary thrust is to argue for the creation of many more fresh expressions so that the church can appeal to a broader spectrum of society. It has an explicitly evangelistic outlook.

The first chapter of the report highlights what it considers to be the major social changes in recent decades, including the fragmentation of communities, consumerism and post-Christendom. It draws attention to the phenomenon of networks within communities. Rather than being members of a single, geographical community, individuals now often belong to different networks such as school, work, sport, and other personal interests. Increased mobility and communication mean that the concept of community stretches beyond its traditional geographic limitations. This has clear similarities with Hull's discussion of plurality, especially his argument that people in modern society inhabit different spheres of existence (see pp23-4). The Church of England parish, however, remains anchored in geographical communities. One of *MSC*'s first conclusions

is that the Church needs to plant not only into communities of place, as it had already been doing, but also into these different networks that stretch beyond the physical limits of the parish. It believes this to be key to transforming mission that had hitherto focused on an inward-looking 'they come to us' approach into an outward-looking 'we go to them' approach. This challenge to the Church is important because it encourages parishes to look beyond themselves to the specific needs of the residents of communities in which they are based. The authors place incarnational and contextual theologies at the centre of their report, encouraging the Church to engage positively with the culture that surrounds it rather than building barriers against it (ibid:87). The report promotes engaging with Church history, tradition and practice in conversation with contemporary culture.

MSC categorises the population, excluding the 6% who are members of other world faiths and traditions (ibid:36ff). Approximately 10% of the remainder attend church regularly and a further 10% are on the fringe and attend sporadically. It describes another 20% as 'open de-churched'. These are those who have previously attended church and would consider returning. An additional 20% have attended church but are 'closed de-churched' and would not consider returning due to prior experience. The remaining 40% are 'non-churched'. They have had no connection with a church other than attending an occasional pastoral service. These statistics serve to illustrate the scale of the problems facing the Church. If 20% of potential attenders have decided never again to attend church and 40% have no knowledge or experience of church, the task of attracting them is made extremely difficult. The report argues that the Church of England can no longer see everyone in a parish as its people and that it is a fantasy to believe that most people will come to church if asked:

The social and mission reality is that the majority of English society is not 'our people' – they haven't been in living memory, nor do they want to be. The reality is that for most people across England the Church is peripheral, obscure, confusing or irrelevant. (ibid:40)

This echoes the opening paragraphs of *Towards the Conversion of England* sixty years earlier which reported a growing alienation of the Church of England from its people. Although *MSC* uses statistics and offers some clearer definition, it repeats some of the issues already raised in *Towards the Conversion of England*. It does, however, raise the important question of how those who have been alienated from the Church can be persuaded to learn about it. The definition of these statistics, however, might appear to overstate the difference between members and non-members and to establish too strong a boundary between inside and outside.

There is much that is positive about *MSC*. It is an attempt to encourage parishes to look beyond the walls of their church buildings and engage with their social and cultural context. It is also a bid to find new ways for the Church of England to exist within the communities within which it operates. The important question this thesis needs to ask of fresh expressions is to what extent do they help to form learning Christians, new or otherwise, who are encouraged to take a critically reflective approach to faith? There have been several critiques of *MSC*, notably Hull (2006) and Percy and Nelstrop (2008). Criticism focuses on three areas. First, the purpose of fresh expressions is to build new and different church congregations. This might be seen primarily as an attempt to increase the number of people attending churches which is built on the premise that a successful Church is one that is growing numerically. The danger is that Fresh Expressions might be understood as a way through which attendance statistics can be improved. Second, a risk of this congregational approach is that the Church might see that its purpose is to serve its members who are defined as those who regularly attend church services, be they fresh expressions or more established worship. The reality is that Church membership is considerably more fluid and consequently more difficult to measure and it serves more people than those who attend worship. Indeed, Fresh Expressions seeks to broaden perception of Church membership. Third, Fresh Expressions can be limited in scope and are often targeted at narrow groups of people based on age, common interests, and social background. This has enabled many congregations to connect successfully with previously unreached demographics in their context.

There is a risk, however, that their narrow nature might lead them to become inward-looking groups, concentrating on their peculiar needs and desires.

Fresh Expressions have value as contextual responses to the needs of a community. They encourage parishes to make connections with different groups, building bridges with those who have limited contact with faith and they have had a significant impact on parish practice. The Fresh Expressions website claims that between 2012 and 2016 there were 1109 Fresh Expressions in twenty-one dioceses with attendance of over fifty thousand (www.freshexpressions.org.uk, 'Our Story'). These groups provide potentially excellent opportunities for a formative approach to learning, introducing people to important aspects of faith, although this should be balanced by a suitably critical and dialogical approach. There are also some challenges. With the variety of worship that Fresh Expressions promotes, it might mirror elements of the consumerist, self-centred society. In the worst case, Fresh Expressions might lead to a church that is a collection of disparate, unrelated congregations. To counter this danger, members of Fresh Expressions should be encouraged as soon as possible to engage with faith beyond the relatively limited confines of their group in order to create an environment in which their learning can continue to develop in dialogue with Church life and wider society.

2.7 Concluding Comments

This chapter began with a description of the statistical issue of attendance facing the Church of England followed by a discussion of the 1945 report *Towards the Conversion of England*. It is noticeable that many of the concerns that were raised in this report are common to the Church's concerns many decades later. *Towards the Conversion of England* was a response to decreasing church attendance, the perception of a growing alienation between Church and people, and the failure of the Church to be suitably structured to deal with the changes it was facing. At the other end of this chapter, *Mission Shaped Church* was an attempt to deal with the same issues. It seeks to build bridges between the

Church's practice in its worship and people who are increasingly disinterested in faith and what the Church has to offer.

There are four key points in the development of the post-war Church. First, there has been increasing concern with statistics. The consistent decline in church attendance in recent decades is worrying and reversing this trend is a key priority. The Church has sought to engage positively with new demographics and changes in society, most notably through *Mission-Shaped Church*, and has experienced some success. There may be a danger here, however, that the Church's language might move in the direction of a membership-based ecclesiology in which it progressively differentiates more between members and non-members as opposed to the universal approach that has historically shaped it. A further risk of this emphasis on attendance is that the Church might seem to be more concerned with preserving its relevance as an institution through numerical means rather than the effects of the work that it does.

Second, it might appear that the Church has become a much more inward-looking institution, pre-occupied with its own internal issues rather than engaging with wider society. In the second half of the twentieth century, it reformed its structures, liturgy and ministry and became increasingly centralised. More recently, coverage of the Church in the press has been dominated by its conversations about women's leadership and sexuality. For some, this has further alienated it from the wider population rather than overcoming the divide raised by *Towards the Conversion of England*. In the mid-1980s, however, the Church generated a high profile national debate following the publication of *Faith in the City*. Whilst the Church has continued to engage with social questions and action both locally and nationally, this national impact has not been repeated. Consequently, it might seem that the Church has distanced itself from broader conversations about culture and society and is more concerned with its own institutional needs.

Third, even though the proposals of *Towards the Conversion of England* were not implemented, they were mainly concerned with a didactic approach to evangelism. The Decade of Evangelism in the 1990s failed to inspire dioceses

and local parishes and was ultimately overshadowed by other key events, especially the ordination of women. Whilst there was a movement towards more participatory, group learning from the 1950s onwards which significantly changed the learning landscape in the Church of England, the final years of the century saw the beginnings of a return to more catechetical, direct learning and a move away from critically reflective learning. The rapid growth of discipleship courses in the 1990s focused primarily on bringing new people into churches and adopted a didactic rather than an exploratory approach to faith. The influential *Mission-Shaped Church* contains no mention of how those attending fresh expressions would be given the opportunity to reflect on and learn about faith.

Fourth, although clergy selection significantly improved in the post-war years, it is notable that, whilst the criteria for selection now include a reference to mission and evangelism, understanding of effective approaches to learning in the parish context continues to be omitted. Although this may well be addressed within different ordination training courses, its ongoing omission from the selection criteria suggests that it might not be a significant priority in ministerial formation.

The ways in which learning takes place in churches have not received the attention they are due. Despite some encouraging signs in the middle part of the twentieth century, the dominance of discipleship courses in recent years which rely on direct learning might suggest that the balance has shifted to a more subject-centred, less critical approach. Good quality adult religious learning should be a vital part of the Church's strategy if it wishes not only to bring new people into its buildings but also to create communities of critically reflective, learning Christians. The next chapter will consider the extent to which this attitude has changed in more recent Church of England reports and initiatives.

Chapter 3: A Changing Church – The Influence Of *Renewal And Reform* On Adult Religious Education

3.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters have explored the theoretical and historical background to this thesis. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the current situation in the Church of England, concentrating on the *Renewal and Reform* programme which is dominating much of its current activity.

Justin Welby was enthroned as Archbishop of Canterbury on 21st March 2013. Ordained in 1992 with the support of Holy Trinity, Brompton, Welby was appointed Archbishop having only been a Bishop for a year, prior to which he had been Dean of Liverpool Cathedral for four years. His relative lack of experience in senior church appointments was seen by many to be offset by his eleven years of experience in the oil industry and the management and business skills that he could bring to his new role. Welby inherited a Church that was faced with several important challenges. As has been argued in the previous chapter, the language and priorities of the Church of England from the 1990s onwards show that it had become increasingly focused on numerical growth through evangelism and its own internal issues rather than engaging with wider society. At the time of Welby's enthronement, the ongoing debate about the place of ordained women in the Church was an immediate concern following General Synod's vote in November 2012 against the proposed legislation for the ordination of women as bishops. This had resulted in a backlash from politicians, the press and the public. The Church of England and the wider Anglican Communion continued to be deeply divided over sexuality. The failed attempt to appoint Jeffery John as Bishop of Reading and the election of Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire in 2003 (both men in openly gay relationships) still cast a significant shadow over relationships between different factions at home and abroad. There was also the significant issue of the Church's rapidly dwindling sphere of influence driven by the continuing decline in those sitting in its pews and substantial changes in society.

Welby set three priorities for his ministry as Archbishop of Canterbury (www.archbishopofcanterbury.org, *Roles and Priorities*). Through his first priority, prayer and the religious life, Welby encourages people to engage in prayer in order to deepen their relationship with Christ and supports the establishment of new religious communities. As part of this work, in 2015 the Archbishop established the Community of St Anselm at Lambeth Palace, providing the opportunity for a group of 20-35 year-olds to 'spend a year in God's time'. Within the second priority, reconciliation, the Archbishop continues his work from a previous role as Canon for Reconciliation Ministry at Coventry Cathedral through supporting reconciliation between different factions in war-torn areas of the world. He also wants relationships between different traditions within the Church of England to look beyond their long-term differences and the fractious relationships within the Anglican Communion to be renewed. Whilst the first two priorities have consequences for religious learning in that they encourage deeper engagement with questions of prayer, religious life, and reconciliation, it is the third priority of evangelism and witness that resounds strongest in the context of religious learning. Welby defines evangelism as 'showing others – through our words, actions, attitudes and interactions – how God has offered every one of us a new start' (www.archbishopofcanterbury.org, 'Evangelism'). It is predominantly meant to be a demonstration of the message of Christ to those on the outside of the Church and is described as 'the only response there is to what God has done for us through Jesus Christ'. Witness is an extension of evangelism. It is what we do as a consequence of 'our personal meeting with Jesus' and our knowledge that 'we have known him take our guilt away'. Evangelism, therefore, is understood as the communication of the Gospel made evident through the subsequent actions of a faithful life. On the one hand, it might be argued that these priorities are inward-looking. Encouraging prayer and the religious life is confined to already practising Christians. Although some aspects of reconciliation look beyond the Church, it is also concerned with shoring up fragile relationships between different parties within the Church of England and the Anglican Communion. Whilst evangelism and witness seek to engage with those beyond the Church, the language of this priority suggests a henotheistic, membership-based view in which it is imperative for Christians on the inside to share this knowledge with others and to bring them into the community of

believers. On the other hand, Welby has engaged with wider issues, provoking debate and precipitating change. This has happened most notably through his membership of the Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards and his discussion of payday loans companies in the media (Brown, 2014:19-21).

An important development of the early years of Welby's primacy is the *Renewal and Reform* programme. Launched in early 2015, *Renewal and Reform* seeks to transform many aspects of the Church of England. Four task groups were initially established to look at key parts of the Church's institutional work – Resourcing the Future of the Church of England, Resourcing Ministerial Education in the Church of England, Simplification, and Developing Discipleship. The work of these groups has widened as the *Renewal and Reform* agenda has developed. The explicit purpose of *Renewal and Reform* is to enable the Church to grow numerically. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York presented a report to General Synod in February 2015 which outlined the rationale and purpose of their proposed programme (General Synod, 2015a).⁸ Stating that 'the urgency of the challenge facing us is not in doubt', they cite the decline in attendance at services, the risk to church finances, the ageing profile of congregations and clergy, and the burden of church buildings as the major factors behind the initiative (ibid:8,9,10). The extensive agenda of *Renewal and Reform* will affect the Church for the foreseeable future. Consequently, it will also influence the place of adult learning in the Church of England and is, therefore, highly significant to this thesis.

This chapter will focus on the effect of *Renewal and Reform* on adult religious learning. It will provide a summary of the different parts of *Renewal and Reform* before looking in depth at the key reports that point towards its understanding of adult learning within the Church of England and the theology that underpins it. It will ask if *Renewal and Reform* might create a suitable environment in which high quality religious learning can take place. The chapter will reflect on the extent to which this programme contributes to adult religious learning that reflects the principles outlined at the end of Chapter 1. The chapter's conclusion will look at

⁸ See Appendix A.

the implications of the analysis on the identity of the Church and the place of adult religious learning within it.

3.2 *Renewal And Reform* – A Summary

Since its launch in 2015, the work of *Renewal and Reform* has developed from the four original task groups into seven different streams (www.churchofengland.org, ‘Renewal and Reform’). Each stream is at a different point in its development and relationships with the theme of adult religious learning vary. For the purpose of this thesis, the reports and papers considered are those submitted up to and including the February 2017 Group of Sessions. In summary:

- *Renewing Discipleship and Ministry* addresses the need to grow vocations to ordained ministry and proposes an increase of fifty percent in candidates for ordination. It is considering ways in which lay ministry can be developed and how ministerial education can be reformed to emphasise mission and be more adaptable to the rapidly changing social climate. It is reviewing the selection criteria for ministry as well as the procedures for discernment and selection. The most relevant aspect of this stream is the *Developing Discipleship* report which outlines several important proposals that will be considered in detail later in the chapter (General Synod, 2015b).
- The role of the *Lay Leadership* stream is to investigate how to harness the faith and ability of the laity to offer leadership inside and outside the Church. Its first report, *Setting God’s People Free*, is concerned with how to value lay vocation and the different roles laity can undertake (General Synod, 2017). It considers discipleship, the relationship between Church and wider society, questions of relationship between clergy and laity, and addresses key questions relating to adult religious learning.

- *Resourcing the Future* seeks to transform the way in which funds for mission and ministry are used, especially the funds assigned to dioceses under the current Darlow formula and the Church Commissioners' funds for mission development (General Synod, 2015c). From 2017, half the available monies will be given to dioceses to fund parishes where there is recognised low income and half will be available to fund new growth opportunities. The intention is to ensure that all available funding is spent on 'spiritual and numerical growth'.
- *Peer Review* is introducing a system whereby dioceses are subject to a review undertaken by another diocese which will focus on mission, evangelism and discipleship.
- *Evangelism and Witness* is looking at three aspects of evangelism. It will consider how to use digital resources for discipleship better, improve training, and develop more general communication about faith. It sees evangelism to university students to be of central importance and will consider how to resource an extension of this ministry. There will also be a development in ministry to housing estates, partly enabled by the change in funding from implementing the funding changes in *Resourcing the Future*. Most importantly for this discussion, a specific Evangelism Task Group has been established, chaired by the Archbishop of Canterbury. This will look specifically at encouraging lay witness, growing urban estates ministry, developing tools for evangelism, engaging with ethnic minorities, engaging young people, equipping clergy to lead evangelism, and focussing on prayer.
- *Nurturing and Discerning Future Leaders* stems from the proposals from the Green Report (Lord Green Steering Group, 2014). This has led to the initial introduction of management-focused leadership programmes for bishops and deans which are based on MBA qualifications. It has also established a 'talent pool' of clergy who have been identified as having the

potential to be future leaders. This select group are assigned to the 'Strategic Leadership Development Programme'.

- *Simplification* aims to propose changes to canons, legislation, regulations and procedures with the purpose of streamlining the Church's decision-making processes locally and nationally.

It should be noted that *Renewal and Reform* is not monolithic. It brings together a number of strands of work, different aspects of which are on varied principles. Regarding learning, the pedagogical understanding of the Evangelism Task Force varies considerably from the more contextual approach proposed for strengthening ministry in housing estates. *Renewal and Reform*, however, does share some common themes. First, there is an overarching commitment to a numerically growing church. Every aspect of the Church, from finance and law to clergy training and parish initiatives is being challenged to focus resources on growth. Second, in a striking parallel to the 1945 report *Towards the Conversion of England*, there is the view that the laity need to be empowered in leadership and ministry and considered to be at the forefront of evangelism as those who can bear first-hand witness to Christ. Third, in a further similarity to *Towards the Conversion of England*, there is an aim to transform training for ordained ministry to equip clergy to concentrate on growth through evangelism. The growth agenda, therefore, dominates *Renewal and Reform*.

3.3 The Theology Of *Renewal And Reform*

One of the principal criticisms of *Renewal and Reform* has been that it lacks theological rigour and is no more than a series of initiatives whose aim is to reverse the numerical decline of the Church of England. What, then, is the theological foundation of *Renewal and Reform*? As has already been discussed, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York first presented an outline of *Renewal and Reform* to General Synod in February 2015 (General Synod, 2015a). Other than a brief reference in the opening paragraph to Jesus' commission to proclaim the good news afresh in each generation (Matthew 28:16-20), this paper contains

no further theological reference. The lack of theology in this initial presentation of *Renewal and Reform* is surprising and might suggest that the Archbishops are seeking institutional reform to promote growth rather than a programme that finds its roots for the future of the Church in well-executed theological reflection. This paper, however, served only as a starting point for *Renewal and Reform*.

In June 2016, a paper was brought to General Synod entitled *A Vision and Narrative for Renewal and Reform* (General Synod, 2016b).⁹ As there was over a year between the Archbishops' initial proposals for *Renewal and Reform* and this paper, it might have been expected to develop the initial outline and present an in-depth theological reflection on the programme. This vision document, however, scarcely engages with theology. It states that *Renewal and Reform* is 'rooted in an understanding of Luke 10:2' (ibid:2).¹⁰ There is no explanation of what the programme's understanding of this verse might be and why it has been selected as opposed to other scriptural or theological starting points. There are further glancing references to images of salt and light, loving our neighbours as ourselves, living in a time of hope, and of how God calls unexpected people in unexpected places (ibid:3,4). These brief references are neither explored in any detail nor do they point to any sources. This vision paper declares that it 'offers a message of hope through changed lives and transformed communities as people of faith and people finding faith also discover their vocation to love God and serve others. This loving service will find voice and expression in myriad ways but will be underpinned by justice, mercy and a humble walk with God' (ibid:5). Once again, these themes warrant substantial further exploration to give *Renewal and Reform* a theological backbone but are left untouched. This handful of paragraphs at the start of this explanation of *Renewal and Reform* is the extent of the theology of a document whose purpose is to present the vision for a programme of transformation of the whole Church. The rest of the paper repeats the institutional challenges facing the Church – the decline in numbers and clergy, the unsustainability of ministry, the lack of leadership capability, the lack of capacity in dioceses to develop transformation, and legal constraints (ibid:8). It

⁹ See Appendix B.

¹⁰ 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field'.

also states that *Renewal and Reform* is seeking to grow disciples, bring a wider variety to ordained and lay ministries, redirect financial resources, develop mission projects, and simplify the Church's legal structures. This vision and narrative is typical of many of the papers and documents relating to *Renewal and Reform*. It focuses on the issues facing the Church and suggests the direction that it could take but engagement with theology is superficial. There are no more than passing references to theology and scripture and where these do occur, there is an attempt neither to explore them in any detail nor to reflect on their implications for the Church of England in the twenty-first century. More space is given to explaining the pragmatic, institutional need for reforming the Church than to expanding the theology that underpins it.

More recently, perhaps in response to criticisms about the theology of *Renewal and Reform*, the Church has published papers considering the theological aspects of this programme of transformation. At the time of writing, three papers were published on the Church of England website where it is stated that '*Renewal and Reform* is a deep-rooted approach to change in the Church of England that must be based on a robust theological understanding' (www.churchofengland.org, 'Renewal and Reform'). Sam Wells, Vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields, provides a theological reflection about the future of the Church in the context of the account of David slaying Goliath (Wells, 2016). He argues that the Church has for too long understood itself to be like Goliath – a figure that is immovable, impregnable and important in the national consciousness. The decline faced by the Church challenges this self-perception. Wells encourages the Church to see beyond its self-perception and 'to become David – the David who had five smooth stones – but knew exactly how to use them; the David people instantly called to mind when they encountered Jesus'. More practically, Wells believes that the Church must build on its extensive assets. These are its established tradition of ministry with its parish system, its network of lay and ordained ministry, a continuing culture of respect for the Church in government and civil society, its involvement in education, an ability to draw together diverse people into one body, and an already-established group of followers. He also believes that the Church must address the areas where it is falling short. These are where the Church is perceived to be out of touch or

irrelevant to wider society, its inflexible, Goliath-like institutional structures, and the need to equip leadership at all levels to build on its assets. Overall, Wells' paper is an example of in-depth theological reflection that challenges the Church's ecclesiological self-understanding and has the potential to open up equally in-depth discussion about the Church's future and response to its current position. It encourages the Church to reflect on its strengths and weaknesses in the context of today's society and to work out what the substance of its 'five smooth stones' might be. Yet this paper was published retrospectively. It is theology that is being read backwards into an institutional process that has already begun rather than providing a starting-point for a discussion leading towards a developed theological foundation for *Renewal and Reform*.

This view of the retrospective nature of the theology of *Renewal and Reform* is supported by the paper written by Jeremy Worthen, the Church of England Secretary for Ecumenical Relations and Theology at the Council for Christian Unity (Worthen, 2016a). He writes:

While it is important to test [the *Renewal and Reform* proposals], it would not be right to expect them all to flow logically from some kind of detailed theological blueprint. That is not the normal way that things happen in the life of the church, at any level. Yet with *Renewal and Reform* firmly established, now is an appropriate time to probe its roots, see where they lead and also how they might be strengthened to give greater nourishment to the activities that it is supporting.

This is an astonishing statement. Not only does it accept that *Renewal and Reform* is not based in any form of structured theological reflection or thought but it also suggests that an approach in which decisions and actions precede theology is an established part of the Church's behaviour. Whilst it might be argued that the Church's central doctrines were established in the centuries after Jesus' death, there is much convincing evidence to suggest that theology should precede action. Jesus emerges into his period of active ministry following a time of solitude, meditation and temptation in the wilderness. In John's Gospel, Jesus embarks on an extensive theological discourse over the Last Supper before

committing himself to the actions of his final days. Following their initial rescue from Egypt, the Hebrews spend forty years wandering through the wilderness contemplating the nature and substance of their new relationship with God before they are even permitted to reach the Promised Land. The liturgical seasons of Advent and Lent encourage Christians to reflect on and prepare for the celebrations that are to come, not those that have already taken place. Proper theologically-based preparation and reflection should be at the forefront of the actions of the Church providing them with sure foundations. Without a properly constructed theological foundation, it might be argued that *Renewal and Reform* is little more than a management exercise in institutional change. Worthen writes of the importance of the root system to plants and how they will not grow if they are dug up too many times. Properly-articulated and reflective theology should act as the root system for the actions of the Church. *Renewal and Reform* needs a fully developed root theology that can sustain its projects and proposals but this theological root system is not present. The theological roots of *Renewal and Reform* are at best insubstantial and a plant without a good quality root system is unlikely to survive for long.

If theology does not provide the roots for *Renewal and Reform*, what does? In an essay about *Renewal and Reform*, Martyn Percy, Dean of Christ Church Oxford, argues that the decision-making process in the Church of England is being increasingly influenced not by theology but by pragmatic managers whose concern is primarily the idolatry of the institution of the Church (Percy, 2016). He writes, 'the Church might as well be a supermarket chain or car plant; the only difference being that we are 'selling' God and trying to increase our customer base through our outlets (i.e. churches)' (ibid:1). He accuses the Church of being dominated by managerialism. He provocatively refers to the 'zombie Church' which is being kept alive not by depth of content but by managerial processes and targets. A prevailing managerialism within the Church has led to the development of *Renewal and Reform* whose purpose is to lead to the tangible success of numerical growth. Percy believes that *Renewal and Reform* does not 'seem to understand the subtle, rich nature of the church they seek to improve' and that there is 'little evidence of having a deep and rich comprehension of the body they propose to reform' (ibid:3). The risk of this managerial approach and

its obsession with measurable, numerical growth to preserve the institution is twofold. First, it might change the nature of the Church to a membership-based institution, leading to a henotheistic community with clear boundaries that differentiate between members and non-members. This runs against the Church of England's tradition of being an institution with indistinct boundaries that serves and supports far more than those who regularly attend its church services. Second, it might place too heavy a focus on the desired managerial outcome of growth in attendance. Pouring resources into numerical growth might deflect from projects that reflect the Church's ethos but are not directly concerned with recruiting more members. Examples might involve developing theology, supporting and nurturing individual faith and spirituality, and missional projects, although these examples and numerical growth are not mutually exclusive. The Church risks becoming one-dimensional and ignoring the breadth and depth of its complex ecclesiological and theological traditions.

What little theology there is within the *Renewal and Reform* agenda is an insubstantial veneer covering the poor substance of what lies beneath. Returning to the allegory of plant growth mentioned by Worthen, attempts to read theology back into the different aspects of the programme are like trying to grow a new root system for a plant that has already grown. Overall, *Renewal and Reform* appears to be guided less by theology and more by a pragmatic, managerial desire to preserve the institution of the Church of England.

3.4 *Renewal And Reform* And Adult Religious Learning

If the Church is so strongly focused on growing its congregations and membership, what place and role does adult religious learning have within this agenda? The three most important parts of *Renewal and Reform* for adult learning are the Developing Discipleship stream within Renewing Discipleship and Ministry, the work of the Task Force for Evangelism within Evangelism and Witness, and Lay Leadership.

3.4.1 Developing Discipleship (GS1977)

The Developing Discipleship task group, under its Chair, Steven Croft, brought its initial findings to General Synod in early 2015 (General Synod, 2015b). The *Developing Discipleship* report gives an overview of the place of discipleship in faith and how it has been approached within the history of the Church of England. It briefly summarises the development of discipleship, mentioning the monastic movement, the Reformation, the Anglican reformers and the Wesleys. It then considers the understanding of discipleship that developed in the Church of England in the twentieth century. Noting that there were only three reports on discipleship across the century (Joint Committee of the Convocation of Canterbury, 1902; General Synod Board of Education, 1985 and 1999), its conclusion is that, although there is no lack of writing on discipleship in the broader context, there is no coherent and authoritative understanding of discipleship in the Church of England (ibid:37). The authors believe that this has led to an approach to discipleship that is restricted to the internal life of the church rather than wider society, is more concerned with formal ministries than the role of the laity, and fails to support people to live out their faith in daily life (ibid:38). This is an indictment of the Church's development of discipleship. The report refers to *Towards the Conversion of England* which seventy years previously set out the role that the laity could play but whose proposals were never implemented. There has been a lack of recognition of the potential role of the laity in the Church. *Towards the Conversion of England's* discussion of the gap between clergy and laity and the hesitancy of the laity to discuss theology, both of which are also referred to by Astley, clearly support this point. *Developing Discipleship's* intention to overcome this should be broadly welcomed but its approach should be examined further.

Developing Discipleship makes three initial proposals based on the conclusion that the Church needs to reflect on discipleship (ibid:8). The first proposal is that dioceses and parishes should consider the 'Ten Marks of a Diocese committed to Developing Disciples' which were first proposed in 2014 (ibid:8).¹¹ Although

¹¹ See Appendix C.

these were originally directed at dioceses, the report suggests that they are easily transferable to individual parishes and other expressions of church. The second proposal is that the Church should embark on 'a new theological conversation on discipleship and theology' within a group of bishops, theologians, and theological educators (ibid:8-9). This reflects the report's conclusion that there is a lack of coherence to the Church's understanding of and approach to discipleship. This conversation was to take place in late 2015 but at the time of writing, no update has been published. The third proposal is that the Church of England should produce a revised catechism within five years (ibid:9). It recognises that the current catechism in the Book of Common Prayer is targeted at children who are growing up in Christian families in a predominantly Christian society. A revised catechism should be focused on adults and children and reflect changes in society. Its purpose is also to be a statement on the Church's 'common understanding of discipleship' and as part of the revision, resources 'to help the whole Church explore and live out our common discipleship' should be commissioned.

The report makes many encouraging points about potential pedagogical foundations for learning in the Church. The sixth of the 'Ten Marks' encourages dioceses to adopt 'good practice in facilitating learning and formation'. It recognises that being a disciple is a lifelong process as Christians seek to understand what it means to live a Christ-like life. It describes discipleship as 'a life of learning and formation in the likeness of Christ' (ibid:7). There is a commitment to nurture disciples in their faith and to value the contribution of every member of the Church (ibid:21). This is also made explicit in the first of the 'Ten Marks' which suggests that good practice should involve offering 'opportunities for nurturing faith, prayer and discipleship across all generations, so that all Christians continue to grow as followers of Jesus in their understanding and their actions'. This lifelong understanding of discipleship and the encouragement of ongoing nurture suggest an acceptance that Christian learning is a continuing process that should engage with the changing circumstances of individual lives. Importantly, the report also states that there is far more to learning than formal education which plays an important but secondary role:

Disciples are sustained in their on-going Christian life not primarily through courses but through worship, mission and community – through being with Jesus and being sent out. We grow in our discipleship through Christian witness at work and in our leisure, in our prayers and in our worship. Disciples are formed and sustained through experiences of difficulty and suffering as well as through joy. (ibid:16)

This acknowledges that there is far more to the way in which adults learn in churches than intentional educational programmes. Whilst they still form an important part of the learning landscape, discipleship courses can only help people to learn about faith up to a certain point. Other learning comes from being part of a church community, experiencing worship and the way in which faith is practised in day-to-day life. Formal faith education programmes in churches remain objective until their content is connected to these subjective experiences. Again, the ‘Ten Marks’ seem to support this through the second mark which stresses that ‘the importance of discipleship in daily life is affirmed’. These ideas hint at significant connections with some of the points made at the end of the first chapter of this thesis, in particular the value of experience and community as well as a recognition that church pedagogy should not rely purely on content-based, direct learning. Learning also takes place obliquely through participation in the life of the Church.

Whilst *Developing Disciples* is an initial report, it sets the direction for this stream of *Renewal and Reform*. There are some encouraging signs in its emphasis on lifelong learning. Reflecting the importance of learning through participation, it makes the strong point that formation as a disciple involves being part of a Christian community. This is further defined as participating in its acts of worship, in particular the Eucharist, acts of service in the community that bear witness to faith, and being sent out in mission. There are, however, some areas which would benefit from development, possibly within the planned theological conversations.

First, the report opens with the quotation of Jesus' Great Commission from Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 28:19-20).¹² Placing these verses at the head of the report highlights a possible flaw. At first sight, this verse might suggest that the report's focus is on making new disciples. Yet it is also concerned with the continuing development of those who are already committed to a lifelong journey of discipleship. Although these are both important aspects of discipleship, the learning needs of a disciple at the beginning of her journey are likely to differ substantially from those as she progresses. The report would benefit from further clarification through an exploration of the relationship between them. Second, the language used appears at times to emphasise that the Christian is somebody who is different to wider society, set apart by God 'to live a distinctive life of witness and service, an apostolic life, sent into the world, to follow God's call' (ibid:8). The report quotes several New Testament images that reinforce this message (ibid:13). A risk of this language is that it might place too much difference between Church and world, thereby moving towards henotheism. From the perspective of learning, it would be good to understand more about how disciples might relate to the world and to consider where the balance might be between learning from the world and using faith to critique it. Third, the report repeatedly stresses the missionary aspect of discipleship. Disciples are 'sent out in mission' to reflect the Great Commission (ibid:8). It states that 'together as the Church we are the Body of Christ, a community of missionary disciples' and that 'this missionary discipleship is the foundation of every Christian's vocation to work and service' (ibid:20). This might suggest that the report's view of the role of the disciple from baptism is to move from the Church into the world, communicating its distinct message in a number of different ways and whose ultimate purpose is to bring others to Christ. This evangelistic role is important but there remain questions of how this relates to other aspects of discipleship voiced elsewhere in the report, in particular those that value ongoing, personal learning.

¹² 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, until the end of the age'.

Second, *Developing Discipleship* proposes a central role for catechesis which it describes as follows:

Disciples are formed through the ancient discipline of catechesis, teaching the faith to those who are ready to learn more and preparing to be baptised and confirmed or to renew their baptismal promises. (ibid:17)

Whilst catechesis is concerned with the initial formation of disciples, it is not linked with their ongoing support and development. The original Church of England catechism from the Book of Common Prayer was designed to provide the basis for regular instruction in faith for those who were being prepared for baptism and confirmation, primarily children. The B.C.P. rubric states, 'the Curate of every Parish shall diligently upon Sundays and Holy-days, after the second Lesson at Evening Prayer, openly in the Church instruct and examine so many Children of his Parish sent unto him, as he shall think convenient, in some part of this Catechism'. It served as an outline of the basic tenets of Church of England Christianity and was meant to be learned by every child prior to confirmation along with the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments. The report's proposal that a new catechism should be developed is based on a perceived need for an updated resource suitable for the twenty-first century and for use with adults as well as children. The concentration on revising the catechism highlights questions about the report's understanding of learning. First, how might the new catechism be used? If it is to be a presentation of Christian beliefs that is to be learned and assented to by believers new and old, this might allude to a pedagogy that prioritises authoritarian direct learning. The argument of this thesis, however, would encourage it to be used as the starting point for a more critical and reflective exploration. Second, if catechism is a starting point for new disciples, what might constitute potential content for continuing disciples? This is hinted at through references to participation but there are no concrete proposals about how this might be explored providing the foundations for learning in lifelong discipleship.

Overall, the extent to which *Developing Disciples* suggests that the Church's understanding of learning will move towards incorporating the key principles

raised at the end of the first chapter is unclear. There are some encouraging aspects to the report but there are also possible signs of a focus centred more on creating new disciples rather than supporting ongoing disciples and an educational approach that is more direct than exploratory. The particular stress that ongoing discipleship should concentrate primarily on mission might be understood to prioritise an evangelistic movement from the Church to the world beyond. As an initial report, however, it should not be expected to show a detailed theology of discipleship. This is the task of the proposed theological conversations.

3.4.2 Evangelism And Numerical Growth – The Evangelism Task Force

The understanding of adult religious learning suggested under the auspices of *Renewal and Reform* appears to be connected primarily to evangelism, although this would not be a view common to the whole Church of England. This has been a growing focus since the Decade of Evangelism in the 1990s and the growth of discipleship courses such as *Alpha* and *Emmaus*. There were several papers concerning evangelism prior to the launch of *Renewal and Reform* and the establishment of the Evangelism Task Group. Facilitating numerical growth was formally recognised as a key priority for the Church in 2010 and an initial group was subsequently established to address it (House of Bishops/Archbishops' Council, 2010). The group presented its initial findings and proposals in *Making New Disciples* (General Synod, 2012). The report provided the foundations for future work in this area within the parameters of *Renewal and Reform*. The report contains a significant contradiction. On the one hand, it cites the numerical decline and age profile of congregations as a key reason for the Church to undertake more explicit evangelisation (ibid:14, 15, 16). On the other hand, it states that 'seeking to preserve the institution of the Church is a very questionable motive for mission because it is essentially selfish mission for the sake of the Church rather than for the sake of the world or for the sake of God' (ibid:19). It is difficult to argue this point of view when the Church continually cites numerical decline as the most important reason for its increased focus on evangelism. This key tension also raises a significant question for this thesis. To what extent is the Church seeking to educate people for its own numerical self-preservation or for

the spiritual learning and development of individuals and congregations? The evidence seen so far might suggest an emphasis on the former rather than the latter.

Making New Disciples encourages the Church to re-organise its resources, ministry, training and structures to enable it to improve its approach to evangelism and it makes eight recommendations (ibid:35, 46).¹³ It is notable that only one of these recommendations is concerned with how people learn. The Church, it suggests, should create 'new resources to teach the faith through small groups (adult catechesis) and to equip people to advance the arguments for faith (apologetics)'. This divides the educational purpose of the Church in two. First, catechesis is the formal process of communicating the faith to potential new members. Second, those who go on to become members of the Church are to be trained to promote and argue for faith through apologetics, thereby seeking to attract the interest of others and encourage them to engage in catechesis. This is a further expression of a membership-based model to faith and church. Within this model, the Church's educational priority is not to deepen faith but to grow the number of people who commit to faith. The primary role of the committed Christian in a more membership-based organisation is to be part of the evangelistic mission of the Church. To support this process, the Church is looking to create centralised material which controls the content of the message.

The report's recommendations were further reflected on in a progress report to General Synod on the Quinquennial challenges to which a discussion paper entitled 'The Seven Disciplines of Evangelisation' was attached, written by Steven Croft (General Synod, 2013a). These disciplines are based on his experience as the Anglican Fraternal Delegate at the Roman Catholic Synod of Bishops in Rome in 2012. They are as follows:

1. The discipline of prayerful discernment and listening (contemplation);
2. The discipline of apologetics (defending and commending the faith);
3. The discipline of evangelism (initial proclamation);

¹³ See Appendix D.

4. The discipline of catechesis (learning and teaching the faith);
5. The discipline of ecclesial formation (growing the community of the church);
6. The discipline of planting and forming new ecclesial communities (fresh expressions of the church);
7. The discipline of incarnational mission (following the pattern of Jesus).

The first and seventh disciplines and, to a lesser degree, the second and fourth disciplines, are relevant to the development of individual faith and learning and warrant further discussion. Croft, however, discusses the disciplines specifically in relation to Church practice. He describes them in turn and raises some questions. Disciplines two to six might begin to indicate a structure for evangelism. Three steps in the process of evangelisation might be discerned from these disciplines. First, interest is gained through apologetics. The discipline of apologetics calls the Church's members to be better equipped to defend its faith and enable the disciplines of evangelism and catechesis. Second, the initial proclamation of faith announces the message of faith. Third, catechesis prepares candidates for rites of initiation along with support following those rites or following courses of Christian nurture. The disciplines of ecclesial formation and planting and forming new ecclesial communities are both concerned with developing current church communities and initiating new ones. Croft does recognise a need to have a flexible approach towards learning. He writes, 'we must be sure that our evangelization is contextual, that one gospel takes flesh in different forms with different people and therefore that we must pay attention to questions of inculturation' (ibid:17). The Church's mission is incarnational and needs to be related to time and place. He also recognises a need not to be 'slaves to a single strategy of programme but alert to the movement of the Holy Spirit'. Little attention, however, is afforded to developing these ideas. From the perspective of the Church, these disciplines are concerned with building the foundation for an outward, one-way movement which communicates the Gospel to possible members beyond the Church's boundaries or with building Church communities.

This report was quickly followed by the publication of a paper focussing on 'intentional evangelism' (General Synod, 2013b). It calls for a 'renewed effort and emphasis' on evangelism and states:

Evangelism is not something that will happen in the present climate on its own without a deliberate and intentional emphasis and strategy to guide us forward which is owned at every level across the Church of England. [...] We need, in brief, to be intentional about evangelism in this next period of our life as the Church of England, not for a five or ten year period but for a generation or more in order to reverse the decline we have seen over the last century and to lay a foundation for the growth of the Church in this land in future generations. (ibid:31)

The institutional need to grow the Church numerically is clearly the catalyst for this evangelistic push. This report proposed that an Archbishops' Task Group on Evangelism should be formed to take initiatives forward (ibid:56). This task group should focus on a national call to prayer, the development of a programme of actions based on the seven disciplines of evangelism, and a call to PCCs, deaneries and diocesan synods to discuss evangelism and form their own agendas. The Task Group on Evangelism, chaired by Justin Welby and later assumed into *Renewal and Reform*, first reported to General Synod in early 2016 (General Synod, 2016a). It proposed a Church-wide week of prayer at Pentecost 2016. This developed into the 'Thy Kingdom Come' initiative which asked for 'people to pray in whatever way they want and with whoever they want for others to come to know Christ' (www.thykingdomcome.co.uk, 'About Us'). The group also proposed some questions to help parishes engage with intentional evangelism.¹⁴ There is a criticism of ministerial development which is seen to support clergy who continue to be focused on pastoral ministry and in which 'intentional outreach is of relatively less importance' (General Synod, 2016a:13). It seeks ministry which is 'understood as a commitment to witness, through word and sacrament, message and action, within the Church and beyond' and candidates for ministry should all be able to demonstrate experience in mission

¹⁴ See Appendix E.

(ibid:14). In short, the Archbishops' Task Group on Evangelism, like so much of *Renewal and Reform* and *Towards the Conversion of England* before it, seeks to re-orientate the focus of the whole Church towards evangelism.

It has been argued that the primary purpose of the realignment of the Church's mission and ministry towards evangelism stems from the numerical decline it is facing. One of the papers included in the task group's first report, however, attempts to engage with the theology of evangelism. 'Evangelism: A Theological and Historical Reflection' by Dr Anne Richards, a member of the Mission Theology Action Group, sets out five themes that she understands to provide the foundation for a theological justification of evangelism (ibid:24-28). This is an encouraging paper because it attempts to engage with something new. The first of the five themes, 'Pursuing the Human', places human beings at the centre of the theology of evangelism. This seeks to engage with the spiritual and theological thought and questioning of those who have no Christian faith. There is the possibility here of recognising that the undeveloped ordinary theology of those on the edges and beyond might have something to offer the wider Church. The second theme, 'Creating Community', considers that Christians appear to be good at making and sustaining communities. It has been argued through Grierson that there is a depth of meaning present in church communities that is expressed in their actions and rituals. The third theme, 'Creating New News', acknowledges that in today's culture the Christian message can lead to misunderstanding, alienation and discrimination. Richards writes, 'one way for further exploration would be for people to feel that in coming to faith they are invited to be co-creators of the future of the Church, where their stories and experiences, whatever those are, are taken seriously, so that those new Christians can feel they are telling stories of our Church which both attracts and delights others'. Evangelism needs to stretch beyond proclamation and teaching to make meaningful connections with people's lives. This is taken further in the fourth theme of 'Honouring Memory' in which our whole lives, both past and future, are considered. Our relationship and understanding of God, whether in the context of faith or without, changes over time. In evangelism, although turning to Christ is symbolically understood as a new birth, every aspect of our lives influences how faith is understood and acted upon. Finally, the fifth mark of

'Being the Face of Love' challenges the Church to reflect on the best kinds of social action it should be involved in to share the Christian message. This reflects the idea that theology is contained and communicated as much in action as in teaching and other intentional acts of evangelism. In the space of only a few pages, this paper provides a far deeper theological reflection on evangelism than anywhere else within the *Renewal and Reform* papers. Further exploration of these themes has the potential to provide a meaningful theological contribution to the evangelistic aspect of *Renewal and Reform* and a foundation for discussions about discipleship. Unfortunately, like much of the theology of *Renewal and Reform*, it risks being too little too late. New programmes will be put in place without taking heed of this potentially transformative theology.

It can be seen from the current rhetoric of the Church of England that evangelism is to be a guiding concern in the years to come. Although attempts are being made to express theology that supports this aim, this is little more than retrospective reflection on an initiative that, rather than emerging from a process of theological reflection, is principally an institutional reaction to numerical decline. Some aspects of *Renewal and Reform* also support a very narrow view of evangelism, referred to as 'intentional evangelism' in which educational efforts will be concentrated on apologetics, proclamation and catechesis. The focus of this approach to evangelism is only perpetuating the Church as an institution. A Church working in this way risks being concerned exclusively with communicating its message with the hope of drawing in new members. Pedagogically, this is a Church whose understanding of learning is increasingly reliant on the approach of direct learning. Action based on a more theologically considered response, however, such as that hinted at in Richards' five themes, would place evangelism on a much broader canvas with equal focus on the needs of individuals and communities, allowing them to develop their faith and approach to evangelism in response to experience and context.

3.4.3 Lay Leadership And Setting God's People Free (GS2056)

The Lay Leadership stream's report *Setting God's People Free* calls for a change of culture in the Church of England which recognises the different roles and

vocations of clergy and laity. It seeks to expand the place of lay people formally, in leadership roles, and informally, in witness to the wider community. It is at pains to state that it is neither concerned with centrally driven strategy nor with shoring up the institutional Church (General Synod, 2017:1). This is, however, difficult to justify in the wider context of *Renewal and Reform* which appears to focus on centralised strategies that act in the interests of the institutional Church. The report is built around two proposed changes in culture. First, it stresses a need to 'form and equip lay people to follow Jesus confidently in every sphere of life'. Second, it seeks a culture in which laity and clergy are 'equal in worth and status, complementary in gifting and vocation, mutually accountable in discipleship, and equal partners in mission' (ibid:2). The report specifies that both of these cultural changes are necessary for the evangelisation of the nation, reflecting the focus of the Church on the sole aim of evangelisation leading to numerical growth. The influence of *Towards the Conversion of England* on *Setting God's People Free* is evident. Both are concerned with bridging the gap between clergy and laity and seeing their roles as complementary as well as training and releasing the laity for evangelism. *Setting God's People Free* acknowledges the inspiration of *Towards the Conversion of England*. It refers to it and quotes from it declaring that its 'words remain as true and as urgently relevant today' (ibid:3).

The two reports are closely related but differ somewhat in their understanding of discipleship. *Setting God's People Free* recognises that if lay leadership is to flourish, there is an associated need to focus on discipleship. It makes two encouraging comments in relation to the changes in culture. First, it acknowledges that there are a significant number of lay people in the Church of England in important positions in the Church and elsewhere but 'few claim to have been given a theological framework or to have the confidence to express biblical wisdom, in both word and deed, in these contexts' (ibid:4). There is a paucity of theological reflection in people's lives which leads to a failure to make meaningful connections between life and faith. The idea of *giving* somebody a theological framework hints at the uncritical nature of direct learning and the suggestion that people do not have sufficient theology themselves undermines the premise of ordinary theology. Nevertheless, the report argues convincingly

that people need to be able to explore the theology that has an impact on their lives and to have the self-assurance to be able to talk about their faith. Second, it believes that the Church should communicate 'the all-encompassing scope of the good news for the whole of life' and 'form whole-life disciples' (ibid:5). It also acknowledges the contextual element to discipleship arguing that 'discipleship is not a course of study but is determined by circumstances. The context keeps changing and the times change so we never stop being a disciple' (ibid:7). This report understands that Christians should be encouraged to make connections between their faith and their lives and that their everyday experiences shape how they respond to it. Belief is not something that stands still but is constantly affected by circumstances.

It is reassuring that *Setting God's People Free* clearly wishes to move the Church towards the formation of an explicitly theologically enabled laity. One of its recommended next steps is that its proposed culture shift should include the 'development of a theologically grounded vision for whole life discipleship' (ibid:25). It is looking to place theology at the centre of lifelong learning in the faith context. In discussing what it believes to be a current 'theological deficit' amongst the laity, the report says that practising Christians need strong theological foundations to their faith so that they can have a stronger voice in influencing the Church's future (ibid:13-15). At this point the report is at its closest to the four principles of adult religious education but it does not go as far as to place individual and context at the centre of theological discourse. Although not mentioned explicitly, there is an implication that its pedagogical paradigm is centred on direct learning. It talks of 'giving' and 'equipping' people with a theological framework, suggesting that lay people need to receive the prescribed theological framework of the Church rather than using their experiences and the way they engage with Church history, traditions and practice as the primary source for learning. The Church should have a greater focus on the latter to harness the lay voice in theology, moving away from reliance on direct learning so that it can engage in dialogue that seeks to create new understanding rather than imposing its own meaning. A further concern is that the report proposes a 'national portal for whole life discipleship' which can be accessible by every member of the Church of England (ibid:25-26). The purpose of the portal is to

provide a forum for sharing information and to put people in contact with each other to share experiences and best practice. Whilst this is to be commended as a potential place for dialogue, a further aim of the portal is to promote tools for discipleship and lay vocation. It has been argued that such material and courses are not always suitable because they impose their own agenda on parishes as opposed to being shaped around a specific context.

Overall, *Setting God's People Free* is the most encouraging of the *Renewal and Reform* papers that are relevant to adult religious learning. Its understanding of the lifelong and contextual elements of discipleship and the need to unlock the theological capabilities of the laity tie in with the four principles of adult religious learning. The report is let down, however, by the language that intimates an ongoing dependency on direct learning and the way in which evangelism remains its ultimate goal. The need to complement the narrow, evangelistic aspects of *Renewal and Reform* hampers the report. The task of setting God's people free should undoubtedly be important to the Church's work but its aim should not be solely improved evangelism. There is the potential to initiate creative theological conversations through which lay people have a key role in moulding future belief and action.

3.5 *Renewal And Reform* - A Suitable Learning Environment?

The Church's desire to address the statistical evidence for its decline is understandable. There is a genuine need for the Church to find ways in which it can communicate effectively with those with whom it has no relationship. In its drive for numerical growth through evangelisation, however, the Church should take care not to become overly concerned with the size of its membership. Success needs to be measured not only by statistical trends but also by the quality of its theology, constructive engagement with society, and lifelong development of its disciples. Too great an emphasis on attendance might narrow the Church's outlook, leading it to prioritise aspects of its work that contribute towards growth at the expense of others. An example of this is the risk of the recalibration of mission funding to the dioceses which will be targeted at projects

aimed at numerical growth. The Church needs to combine its evangelistic drive with the development of theologically reflective Christians who are engaged in a process of developing their own faith as well as that of the Church itself. Indeed, this might lead to individuals understanding their faith better which would in turn help them with evangelism.

This has a significant consequence for the place of adult religious learning and development within the Church of England. The relevant papers of *Renewal and Reform* suggest that the Church's approach to learning is becoming concentrated on two areas. The first is the process of evangelisation from the point of first enquiry to catechesis and commitment. The Church is concerned with creating materials and processes that will focus considerable effort on creating new members. The second area is the development of those who are committed disciples whose attention is to be directed towards the creation of new members. Any learning that they undertake, therefore, will be related to how the Church can improve its evangelisation either through formal lay and ordained ministries or through informal work and witness in the parish. An important next step for those who have been evangelised is to become evangelists themselves. Whilst a good understanding of faith is key to communicating faith, there is a risk that this process could create a Church whose members are concerned less with the ongoing fostering of their faith and more with the evangelisation of others who will numerically guarantee the future of the Church. The stress on evangelisation might come at the expense of exploring and learning from more personal aspects of faith.

Furthermore, this refocussing of the Church's efforts might also jeopardise theology itself. In a Church that is concentrated on the numerical growth of its membership, theological reflection might become a less important priority. The papers presented to General Synod and published on the Church of England website show limited theological reflection. Theological references in these papers amount to no more than a few paragraphs and oblique quotations of biblical texts. At first sight, there seems to be little ambition to establish a strong theological foundation to this programme of transformation. Moreover, theology is not being taken as the starting point for *Renewal and Reform* but appears to

be being read into it retrospectively, treating theology as an afterthought rather than as a first principle. Some of the elements of *Renewal and Reform* are possibly based more in a reaction to the Church's immediate institutional needs and a desire to justify its existence than a considered response based on high quality theological reflection on its future.

The theology of a Church that is concerned with the size of its membership risks being distilled and simplified into a message that can easily be transmitted in its processes of evangelisation. Theology might become a static object that can be passed from one person to another. A carefully packaged, simplified theology, designed to recruit new members is not necessarily a living, developing body of knowledge that is supple enough to respond to the changing needs of the world around it. As it hardens, it becomes more resistant to change and remote from its surrounding environment and culture. Boundaries between Church and society become increasingly impenetrable. A Church whose theology stands too far apart from prevailing culture will probably become estranged from it. In its bid to increase its membership, the Church of England must take care not to further alienate the very people it is trying to reach. The Church of England has inclusive roots grounded in the parochial system and a history of sheltering a wide range of belief, tradition and levels of individual belief. If it follows the route of a more membership-based ecclesiology, the danger is that it will become an institution whose members assent to a system of belief which struggles to connect with the world.

This thesis argues that the creation of an environment in which good quality, critical religious learning which engages with personal experience and context can take place is of vital importance to the future of the Church. At the end of Chapter 2, four principles were stated that would provide the foundation for such an understanding of adult learning in the Church. Each of these will now be considered in the context of the development of *Renewal and Reform*:

The **first principle**, based on the work of Astley, is that theology is found as much in individual lives and the lives of church communities as it is in the seminary and academy. A formal theological education is not a requirement for people to be

able to think and talk of God and that this should be valued on a par with the theology of the academy. It has been argued that providing the opportunities to express and explore this 'ordinary' theology would be a positive step in improving learning practices across the Church. Bringing ordinary theology into dialogue with the theology of the academy would be mutually beneficial as it would provide the opportunity to develop further theological understanding, bringing change to the Church and to individuals. Valuing ordinary theology has the potential to provide greater variety and depth to the Church's wider theological conversation. To achieve this would require parishes to enable individuals to express their own theology and bring it into conversation with others.

It has been suggested that aspects of *Renewal and Reform* might be focussing the actions of the Church more on the future of the institution than on the development of its people. Individuals are seen as tools for evangelisation and the numerical growth of the Church. There is a risk that individuals might not be seen as those whose faith needs ongoing support and nurture and that there would be limited space for individuals to express their own personal theological convictions or doubts. The desire to simplify the communication of faith might encourage a bland approach to theology that creates an easily manufactured, attractive package that can be marketed and sold on to new customers. If the Church were to encourage individuals to express their own theological views, this would be a potentially significant threat to this brightly packaged message geared to create a vastly increased number of followers. The problem with an overly simplified message is that it would ultimately lack the depth needed for a meaningful, long-term presence in people's lives. It would not prevent people from forming their own ordinary theologies but it would create an environment in which these theologies are pushed into the background, remaining private, unexpressed and under-explored.

The **second principle**, grounded in the work of Hull, is that perception of faith changes through different life stages. The experiences and understanding of a young adult will vary substantially from those of older people and these differences can drastically alter the way in which faith is perceived. These different life stages can often throw up instances of significant bafflement in which

experience conflicts with views of faith. These moments of cognitive dissonance have the potential to provide unique instances for individuals to explore and develop their faith in response to their experience. This thesis has argued that, just as it is important for the Church to provide an environment in which people can explore their ordinary theology, so it is also important for it to provide the opportunity for people to feel comfortable enough to articulate and investigate their bafflement in such times of conflict. This can create investigative conversations that scrutinize not only a person's feelings around their bafflement but also the response of faith and theology itself. This dialogue can help individuals to delve openly into the reasons for their cognitive dissonance and to consider how their faith can respond to it. It can also help faith itself to develop and change as it encounters new and challenging situations.

The *Renewal and Reform* reports which have been considered suggest that the Church might struggle to support such dialogue for many of the same reasons as it will have difficulties with recognising and supporting ordinary theology. The danger of the evangelistic zeal of *Renewal and Reform* is that it might leave little room for individual expression and shy away from challenges to its neatly-packaged, simplistic theology. A further criticism is that on first sight, *Renewal and Reform* might not allow for sufficient space for individuals to reflect, learn, and grow their own understanding of their faith. Although this might change, in particular as *Developing Disciples* and *Setting God's People Free* progress, the emerging pattern appears to be that from the moment of evangelistic conversion, it encourages disciples to concentrate on communicating the message of faith to the world beyond the Church's walls, through proclamation and practical witness. In this model, at the moment of commitment, as the evangelised become the evangelisers, individual theological development is no longer as great a priority. The risk is that an individual's theological learning might become stuck at this point of commitment and they will carry a view of faith throughout their life that is trapped in a particular moment, unable to evolve and respond as they develop.

The **third principle**, which comes out of the work of Grierson, focuses on the hidden curriculum of individual parishes. The practices of each Church community communicate important aspects of their belief and what they hold to

be precious. People can learn about the Church and faith through participating in these practices. Some of these practices might be positive and faith-enhancing whilst others might be misplaced and ill-informed. Nevertheless, communities can hold these practices in high regard and woe betide those who seek to change them without due consideration. Congregations are often unable to articulate easily the reasons why such practices are highly valued but this does not erode their importance. Grierson's belief is that the most important starting point for any minister in a new congregation should be to name these practices and uncover the reasons for them. Some of the deepest collective beliefs of congregations and those of individuals within them can be held within these practices. To ride roughshod over these practices can be to trample on some of the most important aspects of a congregation's corporate life and identity. To help a congregation to express and understand the meaning that is held within them, however, can help them to understand and develop their faith as well as potentially to modify their practice.

Once again, the principles which prioritise evangelism suggested in some of *Renewal and Reform* might struggle to support this view that gives precedence to local practice. Whilst there is some acknowledgement that individual dioceses and parishes will have to find their own, local responses to the new evangelistic expectations, the direction of policy and much of the associated content seems to be geared towards a movement from the national Church to individual parishes. One of Grierson's greatest criticisms is of the new minister in a church who seeks to impose their own agenda and theological preferences without taking the local context into account. Some of the initiatives of *Renewal and Reform* run the risk of imposing a particular view of faith on the whole of the Church of England whilst neglecting significant local variations in practice and the wide range of needs across its different dioceses and parishes. There is a danger that this could possibly create a 'vanilla' church that removes the wide range of different flavours that stem from the varying contexts and practices that give the Church of England its depth and breadth of faith. Ignoring the value of the local church and its practices in preference for the restricted, organisational needs of the institutional Church might alienate many of those who form its current foundation.

The **fourth principle**, based on the work of Grainger, argues that when explicit learning takes place within church communities, it should be constructed around a mixed mode of teaching styles and group learning rather than being focused on text-based, direct learning. Whilst text-based approaches can and should have a place within any teaching programme, learning is at its most effective when a variety of styles are used. Grainger proposes that process-orientated learning, in which people learn through the experience of being part of a group and the group itself is the subject for learning, and arts-based learning, in which learning takes place through reflection on involvement in certain scenarios, should be added to text-based learning to form a more holistic experience for adult learning in the Church. This acknowledges that learning is a much broader concept than passing information from one better-informed person to another less-informed person. Direct learning can become overly authoritarian because it guides the learner towards a particular point of view, often that of the teacher. At its extreme, it assumes that people are open receptacles for this knowledge and have had no previous thoughts on the matters in hand. Process-orientated and arts-based learning, however, recognise that learning can also take place within a context of a shared experience and through interaction with other people in the context of a group. They are both expressions of experiential learning in which the learners themselves are the subject and content of their learning.

Grainger's criticism of current programmes of intentional learning in the Church of England is that their dominant pedagogical model is direct learning. They ultimately seek to guide participants towards their particular understanding. Some of the principles seen in *Renewal and Reform* might lead the Church of England to strengthen its reliance on a pedagogy of direct learning. This pedagogy lends itself well to a simplified, attractive, and initially accessible theology in which faith is can be transmitted easily from a person who possesses knowledge of faith to one who does not. Allowing the variables of experiential learning into this learning process might add an unpredictable element and a potential challenge to a theology that is ill-equipped to deal with it. Experience also allows an individual aspect into faith that has already been seen to be something that might disrupt the Church's focus on the survival of the institution.

3.6 Concluding Comments

Renewal and Reform is developing into an extremely varied and wide-ranging programme of change that will have an impact on many aspects of the Church of England. It remains in its early days and many elements are still in the early stages of development and have moved little beyond initial reports. It is impossible to predict the outcomes and the extent to which the four principles will eventually be met.

There are, however, some early hints of trajectories. A clear emphasis on numbers and a desire to address the downward attendance trend is common to the whole programme. This has led to a new emphasis on evangelism. Many elements of *Renewal and Reform* aim to facilitate greater evangelism at every organisational level of the Church. This can be seen in some aspects of *Developing Discipleship*, the work of the Evangelism Task Force, and in the report *Setting God's People Free*. Concerning learning, there is an emerging pattern in which individuals are evangelised and then learn to be evangelists themselves. This reflects a potentially more membership-based ecclesiology. There is a risk in this pattern that some of the ideas of adult religious learning represented by the four principles could be overlooked. The development of catechetical materials might also hint at a continued dependency on direct learning. That said, both *Developing Discipleship* and *Setting God's People Free* both discuss lifelong learning, theological reflection, and the place of participation. The future path of learning in the Church of England revolves around how these ideas are developed.

Finally, doubt has been cast on the theological credentials that provide the foundation for *Renewal and Reform*. The reports that have been considered demonstrate limited engagement with theology and there is some evidence that theology is being considered retrospectively. It appears that these reports are not based on robust theological reflection. Continuing theological conversations, such as that proposed by *Developing Discipleship*, would potentially make an environment in which relevant theological issues can be addressed.

Chapter 4: The Challenges Everyday Theologies Bring To Adult Religious Learning

4.1 Introduction

This thesis has argued for four principles of adult religious learning which are concerned with locating theology first and foremost in the ordinary and everyday. These principles move theology away from the dominance of the academy and seminary by listening to personal experience, recognising the significance of the local and implicit within communities and the oblique learning that takes place as a secondary result of participation in the life of a parish, as well as offering mixed approaches to learning rather than relying on the hitherto default pedagogy of direct learning. It has considered the most relevant areas of the Church of England's development since the Second World War and has shown how its language has become increasingly, although not exclusively, focused on the narrow agenda of membership and evangelisation. It has looked at how this has led to the *Renewal and Reform* programme and the initiatives that are being developed as part of it. It has been argued that *Renewal and Reform* hints at a more henotheistic, membership-based understanding of the Church and that it lacks the sufficiently rigorous theological discourse that would be expected to be present in such a wide-ranging programme of transformation. This has led to the conclusion that the current approach of the Church of England to adult learning, which is grounded chiefly in a desire to increase church attendance dramatically through intentional evangelism and its associated pedagogy of direct learning, will not create the necessary environment for it to incorporate the four principles of effective adult religious learning proposed at the end of Chapter 2.

The key issue for this chapter is to consider how this situation might be transformed so that the four principles might be better understood and subsequently integrated into the Church of England's approach to adult religious learning. It will provide a detailed reflection on the place of everyday theologies in adult religious learning and bring them into deeper dialogue with current Church practice and *Renewal and Reform*. This further exploration of everyday theologies will define their fundamental characteristics and discuss three pivotal

aspects – context, the individual, and practice. Everyday theologies will then be situated within the wider theological framework in order to consider their relationship with other theological approaches. The three central aspects of everyday theologies will be brought in turn into conversation with *Renewal and Reform* and current learning practice in the Church. This will establish the extent to which they are recognised and valued within the agenda of *Renewal and Reform* and reflect on whether current learning practice supports them. Potential practical responses will be explored and the final part of the chapter will identify the consequences of this discussion for the future of adult religious learning in the Church of England.

4.2 Everyday Theologies

4.2.1 What Are Everyday Theologies?

An important feature of everyday theologies is that they are rooted in the many aspects of human existence. They are fundamentally anthropological because they begin with questions about who we are, what we do, and why we do it. Consequently, expressions of everyday theologies can vary according to circumstances as broad as cultural location and personal situation. Whilst it might be argued that *all* theology is anthropological because it ultimately relates to the human condition, the defining characteristic of everyday theologies is that they emphasise a trajectory which always begins with the human situation and moves towards God and dialogue with Christian theology and tradition. Everyday theologies work from the assumption that nobody approaches learning from nothing. Individual thoughts, feelings, and experiences are the lenses through which the Christian story is received and interpreted (Astley and Francis, 2013:47). The point at which faith traditions are combined with human experience is the crucible of all theological discourse. In the theological crucible of everyday theologies, human experience is the active agent which reacts with tradition to generate new understanding and open further perspectives. Everyday theologies might also be described as ‘bottom-up’ theologies because they are characterised by this interpretative movement from human experience towards tradition.

'Bottom-up' theologies contrast with 'top-down' theologies which adopt the opposite movement towards understanding. They begin with a particular reading of Christian tradition through which the human condition is then interpreted. They are often formed from an abstract and transcendent understanding of God who acts on the world and humanity from a position that is far removed from it.¹⁵ In the crucible of top-down theologies, Christian tradition is the active agent rather than experience. The two approaches are not incompatible as their common objective is transformation through greater understanding. The distinction lies in their starting point. With bottom-up theologies, the key questions concern how our experiences shape our understanding of God. With top-down theologies, the key questions concern how our understanding of God shapes our human experiences. Everyday theologies emphasise the hermeneutical role that experience brings to faith.

A significant danger, however, lies in over-emphasising the anthropological nature of everyday theologies. If humanity is placed at the epicentre of theology, it is an easy step towards the idolatry and ultimately relativism. Everyday theologies risk creating a God out of our own image. Valuing them might produce plural theologies where different cultures, communities and individuals form their own multiple understandings of God that are best suited to their own circumstances yet bear little relationship to others. The theology that stems from one community might vary substantially from that of another whose culture and circumstances are significantly different. Giving value to this multiplicity of theologies could lead to a disparate church that might struggle to find unity in its theology and practice. Everyday theologies do indeed create a potentially vast range of different responses to God that emerge from various cultures, societies, communities and individuals. Some of these responses will inevitably contain inconsistencies and conflicts in interpretation. They might also contradict some of the central, accepted doctrines of the Church. An essential part of everyday theologies, however, is that any one understanding that emerges out of a certain set of circumstances must never be allowed to dominate. The theological views

¹⁵ The 'top-down' approach to theology is most closely associated with the work of Karl Barth.

of one community should not override those of another. The image of a spider's web is useful. Each interpretation of everyday theologies is one strand of silk in a complex theological web. Each strand has its own part in the web and is held there in tension with the others. If any strand becomes too strong, it risks disturbing the web and even pulling it apart. Together with the strands of Christian tradition, the many different strands of everyday theologies form a theological web that is held together by mutual understanding. The collective strength of this elaborate web lies in the complementarity of the different strands. There may be fundamental differences between different strands but there is also an interrelatedness in that each strand shares its origin in the desire to discover God's place in its own peculiar situation. This interrelatedness urges the different theological strands to work together towards greater shared understanding.

Everyday theologies, therefore, allow for a plurality of often contrasting and contradictory anthropologically-centred interpretations of faith to be held together as one. The strength of the relationship between each expression of everyday theologies is found in the tension between themselves and established Christian tradition. The true potential of these strands of everyday theologies can be found in the places where they come together with Christian tradition. This is the point at which their differences are made explicit and they are brought together in a creative dialogue whose purpose is to move forward our understanding of God.

4.2.2 Three Key Aspects Of Everyday Theologies

If the defining characteristic of everyday theologies is their human starting point, this is made explicit in three important aspects – context, individual and practice. These three aspects can be related back to the principles of adult religious learning and the arguments of Hull, Astley, Grierson and Grainger discussed in Chapter 1.

First, context is understood to be the features specific to a place in which faith is practised. There are several attributes of a local context that can affect the way in which faith and its associated theology are expressed and interpreted. These can be connected to factors as diverse as nationality, culture and society, social

standing, demographics, geography, and history. No one community will share its context with another, although there may be similarities between them. As a result, no conclusion should ever be drawn about the faith and religious practice of any community without paying due attention to its context. The place of context is related to the third principle of adult religious education which draws attention to a community's hidden curriculum. It is also supported by Grierson's argument that ministers should understand the context of their church community before implementing changes that might otherwise prove to be unsuitable and insensitive. The important question for adult religious education is how context can be allowed to play a part in the learning process in parishes.

The second central aspect of everyday theologies is the individual. The argument here is concerned with the second principle which seeks connections with personal experience. Aside from the influence of local context on an individual's worldview, each person brings the entirety of their life to bear on their own understanding of faith. This is shown in two ways. First, people look at faith through the lenses of their personal experience. Significant experiences can profoundly change people. For example, the death or illness of a close relative will significantly affect the way in which someone feels and acts. It is highly likely that these experiences and resulting changes in perception will also change the way in which a person perceives their faith. As Hull points out, these instances of change are often experienced through moments of bafflement in which closely-held beliefs are tested to breaking point. Allowing the space for people to express such feelings and doubts without fear of being ostracised because of the challenges that they bring to the Church's doctrinal status quo must be an important part of the learning environment in any church community. The second way in which the individual is important to everyday theologies is through the way in which they articulate belief. Based in Astley's theory of ordinary theology, this is belief that is expressed in the vernacular and has scant association with the formal theological language of the academy and seminary. It is theology that is rarely articulated in front of theological professionals, such as the clergy, but it might be voiced at home, at work, or with fellow ordinary theologians in the church community. Parishes need to create the right spaces for people to be able to talk

freely about their ordinary theology and instances of bafflement in which they can feel valued and without feeling belittled by obtuse theological terminology.¹⁶

The third important aspect of everyday theologies, practice, is connected to the third principle. If instances of bafflement and ordinary theology are expressed in language, then practice concerns theology expressed in action. The former is an explicit expression of theology whilst the latter is implicit. This is, therefore, connected to the importance of the hidden curriculum of individual parishes and Grierson's framework of uncovering theological meaning within actions. Theology is expressed implicitly within both liturgical and extra-liturgical practice. Theology in practice can be seen, for example, as much in the way in which baptismal candidates and their families are welcomed and treated by parishes as in the movement and content of the baptismal liturgy itself. It is found equally in the way in which church buildings are set out and used for worship and in any community projects in which a parish might be involved. Grierson encourages ministers to engage with these practices. This has the potential to uncover the understanding of God and faith that lies behind them and to point towards a community's unarticulated shared theological vision. The experience of being involved in these shared practices is a vital part of the learning process in any church community. Through participation, people learn from this latent theological content. Encouraging people to find ways to engage with the implicit meanings of their practice is key to the provision of good quality learning.

All three of these aspects of everyday theologies are linked to the first and fourth principles of adult religious learning. In unearthing the suppressed and undervalued theology which is contained in contexts, individuals, and practice, they share a desire to move theological discourse away from the exclusive setting of the academy and seminary into the realm of the local and ordinary. They form an important part of the process of the democratisation of theology which needs to be supported by a new pedagogy and changed learning methods. This

¹⁶ See *What Helps Christians Grow?* (Foster, 2016). The report recognises that every disciple learns in their unique way. Individual experience is one of four 'paths of discipleship' that also include church worship, group activity, and public engagement (2016:10,18).

egalitarian understanding of theology necessitates learning methods that steer away from a reliance on direct learning.

4.2.3 The Place Of Everyday Theologies In Wider Theological Discourse

Whilst this thesis asserts that everyday theologies should be recognised and valued, it is important that this status does not come at the expense of other elements of wider theological discourse. The language used here is indebted to the 'four voices of theology' in ARCS (Action Research in Church and Society) (Cameron et al, 2010:53ff). The first voice is normative theology. Normative theology, is understood to be the many textual formulations of faith. These include the Bible, liturgical texts old and new, hymnody and worship songs, as well as authorized creeds. Some of these, such as scripture and creeds, have remained substantially unchanged for many centuries, other than through the vagaries of translation. Others, such as liturgy and music, have found different expressions throughout history and continue to vary greatly between contexts. The liturgy of the Church of England has changed through various iterations from the Book of Common Prayer to Common Worship. The lyrics of contemporary worship songs vary from those of nineteenth century hymns. Nevertheless, these are still static, normative texts, all of which contain theology that contributes to the wider theological discourse. The second voice is formal theology. This is theology as an academic subject which is based primarily in universities and consists of the formal study and development of theology. The many parts of theology as an academic subject include Biblical studies, patristics, doctrine, Church history and ecclesiology. This is the study *of* theology and faith and as such those who undertake it may be uninterested in the practice of faith. The nuances of academic theology can often appear to be several steps removed from the practical side of faith. Nevertheless, despite its idiosyncratic language and inaccessibility to the uninitiated, academic theological discourse has much to offer the Church and is a vital part of the wider theological picture. It has been an important part of its history and can provide insights that affect the way in which faith is perceived. The third voice is espoused theology (how a group articulates its belief) and the fourth voice is operant theology (the theology implicit in a group's actions). These voices are concerned with how a group and

individuals within it articulate their belief in word and practice. In this thesis, the espoused and operant voices have been extrapolated into the three key aspects of everyday theologies – context, individual, and practice.

Formal and normative theologies are very different to everyday theologies. In the case of formal theology, it is one step removed from the practice of Church communities and the personal lives of the overwhelming majority of Church members. In the case of normative theology, the unchanging nature of the texts might make them seem equally remote and unresponsive to context and personal circumstances. Both formal and normative theologies might be seen as authoritative expressions of faith which seek to impose a view of faith from their own perspectives. In this respect, they are the antithesis of everyday theologies and in the context of this thesis' argument in favour of theological understanding that begins with experience, it would be very easy to dismiss them. It is not, however, a question of a choice between one and the other. Formal and normative theologies are key elements of theological discourse. Returning to the image of the spider's web, everyday theologies are held in creative tension with formative and normative theology. The web holds together contextual, personal, practical, formal and normative theologies in a constant, complementary state of dialogue. They are all part of a shared theological process. Each one can only be understood in its relationship to the others. If everyday theologies are taken as the key starting point in religious learning, however, they should have the status of first amongst equals because they are the crucial gateway through which dialogue with formative and normative theologies is entered.

4.3 The Influence Of The Three Aspects of Everyday Theologies On The Practice Of Adult Religious Learning

The next stage of this chapter is to discuss the three central aspects of everyday theologies and bring them into conversation with current learning practice in the Church of England and *Renewal and Reform*. Context, individual, and practice are closely connected but each brings a slightly different angle to the theological conversation.

4.3.1 Context

4.3.1.1 Theory

The assumption that an understanding of God's relationship with the world and humanity can benefit from a thorough exploration of the different contexts in which faith is practised lies at the centre of understanding the impact of context on faith and theology. There are several different approaches to contextual theology. Stephen Bevans proposes six models – translation, anthropological, praxis, synthetic, transcendental, and countercultural (Bevans, 1992). The concern in 'bottom up' theologies for a movement from human context towards God has much in common with Bevans' anthropological, praxis, synthetic, and transcendental models (ibid:59ff; 70ff; 93ff; 103ff). Other contextual approaches, however, adopt a 'top down' approach, taking a different direction in which Christian tradition and theology are primary. Bevans' translation model, for example, assumes that there is an unshifting core of the Christian message that is free of the influence of culture and society (ibid:37ff). The meaning of this stripped-down 'kernel' of Christianity is then presented in a relevant way to a new situation and is discovered afresh in this new context.

The starting point for a bottom-up contextual approach to learning should be to focus on the situation concerned through a careful process of listening and observation. A description of the context can help to identify significant behaviours and actions and the local specifics of its society, culture and location. By doing this, the ways in which God is experienced and expressed within a context can be uncovered and investigated. God's presence is, therefore, revealed from within the context rather than from without. Common to all everyday theologies, this approach is grounded strictly in a movement from humanity towards the divine and the belief that fully understanding the human situation provides the most important gateway through which we are drawn towards deeper understanding of God and dialogue with tradition. It requires a belief that context is a vital and trustworthy partner in the theological enterprise.

This influence of context on theology and faith can be extrapolated into a three-step process, examining the present, past and future of the situation concerned. The first step concentrates on the present. The whole of the present situation, be that as narrow as the micro situation of one element of the work of one parish or as broad as the macro situation of the whole of the Church of England, needs to be observed in detail. This step searches for the current circumstances of the context and considers the most significant influences on the way in which life is experienced within it, looking at the external social, cultural, political, demographic, and religious factors. It also looks at personal and communal experiences in order to develop a picture of how they shape the attitudes and behaviours of those who live and work within it. The result is a detailed description of how a Church community is shaped by its context. This can provide important insights into how God is understood and faith is practised within it and identify issues and questions for further investigation.

The second step seeks connections between the present situation and the past. The past can be divided into two. First, there is the history of the context itself. The history of the context is important because the present is never insulated from the past. Each context has its own past from which the present has emerged. The roots of any current situation can inevitably be found within the past, either as a continuation of established, widely accepted opinions and practices or as a reaction against something that has been equally widely rejected. The past and the present are locked together in relationship. A central task of contextual everyday theologies, therefore, must be to unearth these historical roots to reveal everything that has contributed towards the present.

The second element of the past is the history, tradition and doctrine of the wider Church. If context is valued, these can only be understood themselves as contextual responses to faith. The Church's history, tradition and doctrine are theological expressions that are bound to the various times, cultures and societies of the contexts in which they were formed. The views of God presented are equally as tied to their own context as those of the present. Consequently, the books of the New Testament, for example, are reflections and commentaries on the contextual needs of early Christian communities. Although they remain

important as records of God's relationship with the world and how faith has been lived out in the past, these texts and traditions cannot speak directly to the current situation. Nevertheless, they are still extremely important partners in the process of theological dialogue. Parts of the traditions and past practice of the Church and Christianity can inform the present situation through this dialogue, either supportively or critically. The way in which past faith tradition and Church practice are brought together with the present can form important opportunities to forge new understanding. The past acts as a partner in informed, critical reflection rather than as something that gives stringent guidelines for action in the present.

A clear understanding of both the past and the present of the context concerned allows a movement into the third step of this approach which makes decisions about the future. This understanding provides a sure foundation from which a community can move forward with confidence. It ensures that decisions about future actions will be well-informed responses to the needs of the present situation and are grounded in the community's own learning from its past. In this respect, context is placed at the epicentre of the dialogical decision-making process of any Church community. It becomes difficult to make any decision in isolation from this context or to impose one from outside.

This contextual approach is based on Grierson who encourages ministers to begin their work in a church by seeking to understand its current practice and how this has come about (Grierson, 1984:14ff). Any attempt to transform a church community should be a response to this understanding rather than something that is forced on it from outside. Grierson's first stage of 'naming' identifies the community practices which would benefit from further exploration. His second stage of 'interpreting' encourages ministers to understand these practices by seeing how they find their present meaning in the community's past. This leads to a full appreciation of the meaning of present actions and allows the minister to look forward to a future that arises from this understanding. The transformation of communities that Grierson anticipates is, therefore, intimately related to the past. Transformation emerges out of theologically reflective dialogue rather than the imposition of disjointed agendas which are founded on the points of view of different ministers.

4.3.1.2 The Challenge To Adult Religious Learning

If understanding theology is intimately related to context, this brings a significant challenge to adult religious learning. It follows that some of the most effective efforts to help adults to learn within the parish environment should be closely related to context. There are two important implications. The first concerns the content of what is being learned. If theology is so closely bound up with the many aspects of context, there are potentially as many ways in which faith can be understood as there are contexts in which it is practised. There are so many variables between one context and another that the way in which faith is experienced will always differ between them. Faith is something that is flexible and moulded by the contextual concerns and needs of the communities in which it is practised. This malleability of faith leads to the second implication. If the practice and discernment of faith fluctuates so notably between different faith communities, attempts to impose interpretations of faith on them from the outside will be difficult. This brings a substantial challenge to the current predominance of published, generic courses within the Church of England. It has been argued through the work of Grainger that these courses are based around a markedly direct pedagogy. Despite using groupwork and conversation, they ultimately seek to impress their own message and content on to their participants. If the importance of context is to be fully appreciated within parish-based adult religious learning, these 'one size fits all' courses are insufficient because they do not enable parishioners to explore the theology that already exists within their own context and see how it shapes their relationships with God. The language and style of these courses is based on a movement towards communities from the outside.

The challenge for Church communities is how to bring their context to the fore of adult religious learning. The first step for any church community towards developing their understanding and expressions of faith is for them to grasp the influence of their context on everything that they do. This can be achieved through dialogue. Dialogue can lead to the identification of those things in the local context that would value further exploration, is central to growing understanding because it places different opinions in tension with each other and

is key to reflecting on how new understanding moves towards a deeper appreciation of how God is present. This dialogue needs to be a real conversation amongst a group of people representing different points of view. Whilst this groupwork must inevitably involve members of the Church community, it should also look beyond the Church to the wider community context. Members of the community from outside the Church have the potential to influence the theological conversation. As a result, this dialogue can become a broad and creative environment in which context and theology are brought together to open new perspectives and indicate new courses of action.

This approach is related to Thomas Groome's model of learning in 'Shared Christian Practice' groups (Groome, 1980). This model has five movements. *Present Action* identifies an element of present practice that would benefit from further reflection. *Critical Reflection* critiques the present situation, relates it to memory and the past, and considers how it might be in the future. *Dialogue* brings the different critiques into conversation with each in order to broaden understanding. *Story* singles out different parts of Christian scripture, tradition and practice that may contribute towards this process of interpretation. *Vision* is the final part of the process and articulates the new understanding that has taken place. 'Shared Christian Practice' is a further useful example of how adult religious learning can use dialogue to move from context to theological understanding.

Adult religious learning that affords significance to context should be a creative process that brings people together with the intention of identifying where God is present currently and has been present historically within their communities and consequently to reflect on the action to which they are being called in response to their reflections. It is a mutual process that calls Christians to work together amongst themselves and with others from their community to ensure that the work of their Church is directly relevant to the different aspects of their context. This creates a Church whose practice and associated theology emerge first and foremost out of this context.

4.3.1.3 Context And Renewal and Reform

If context is to be given greater value within the learning environment of the Church of England, there needs to be a shift in learning culture. Published courses have been the mainstay of adult religious learning since the early 1990s. A contextual approach to learning in parishes would require a move away from these courses whose premise is based in a pedagogy that pays little attention to contextual learning. Parishes need not be constrained by these courses and should feel that they can form creative responses to their own contexts.

The culture that is being formed by certain aspects of the *Renewal and Reform* programme, however, might lead the Church of England in a direction that is unlikely to give high value to contextual understanding. Much of *Renewal and Reform* is geared towards numerical growth which is to be achieved through evangelisation. Evangelisation is mostly understood as the process of communicating the Christian message to those beyond its boundaries in order to bring them to faith. If the Church begins to see this as its defining task, there is a danger that there might be less space to explore contextual responses to faith. (An important exception to this, however, is the contextual work being undertaken as part of *Renewal and Reform* to build ministry in housing estates.) Contextual theology has a potentially important role to play in evangelism as it can help to forge deep connections between local communities and faith. A Church which stresses context responds meaningfully to its local environment and seeks to make profound links with the communities in which it works. It values a complex web of responses to God that vary according to location and are held in creative tension with tradition. A Church which stresses the approach to evangelism advocated by some of *Renewal and Reform* might be more distant from the community, communicating a more one-way message in the hope that others will hear it and join them. This simplified message of faith might struggle to take into account contextual variations and risks becoming disconnected from the communities it serves. Whilst the direct and contextual approaches can both have their place, the Church should seek a greater dialogical balance between them in order to be effective.

4.3.2 Individual

4.3.2.1 Theory

Much of this theory of contextual theologies can be extended to individuals. Just as the context of communities varies from one to another, so does the personal context of individuals within them. One person's experience of living in a community differs from another according to their own peculiar circumstances. The three-step process of contextual theology can be equally useful in helping individuals to understand their present situation and relationship with God, how this relates to their past, and how it might shape their future. The focus of this section, however, is on how individual perspective and experience have consequences on how faith is interpreted. It is concerned with how people can be encouraged to express their own interpretations of faith and how these can be brought into conversation with others as well as with wider Church traditions.

The individual learning process starts with the self. It considers personal experience, religious or otherwise, to be particularly influential factors in faith. It assumes that although God's revelation in scripture, tradition and doctrine remains important, they can only be understood in relation to the everyday experiences of our lives. Faith is not to be found solely in objective sources but in how the self relates them to their own perspective (Astley and Francis, 2013:49). No matter how many times a person is told about a certain part of Church teaching, they will form their own interpretation of it. The importance for faith lies not in an objective understanding of scripture, tradition and doctrine but in subjective interpretation as individuals develop their personal response to the formal content and practice of faith. In other words, the moment where learning takes place is not in the formal act of communication of faith (explanation) but in the process of its reception through the lenses of personal experience (interpretation). Individuals form their own opinions about all elements of faith and this helps them to form personal constructs of belief. Personal reactions to experiences can be none other than our own and being able to explore them is a key part of the learning process. The ability to state these personal perspectives freely in a safe environment, to listen respectfully to the opinions of others and to

be open to the challenge that they might bring is a potentially powerful learning experience. This is not to say, however, that faith is entirely self-determined. The link with the contextual approach cannot be ignored because life is not experienced in a vacuum. Whilst we are all free to express our own opinions and to have our own feelings, we are each formed out of our own social and cultural milieu which conditions our subsequent responses.

This ties in with Astley's concept of ordinary theology. A central part of holding the individual in high regard as part of the process of religious learning is that everything a person thinks and feels about faith is to be valued. The principal foundation of ordinary theology is that statements of faith by those who have no formal theological training should be cherished even if they are not expressed in the conventional language of academic theology. There is equal value in a parishioner's struggle to articulate their own response to their belief in God as there is in an erudite theological exposition by a qualified theologian. To respect personal opinions is also to hold a person in high regard. If a person is listened to and valued they can be truly nurtured in their faith. They are not simply told what they should believe but are encouraged on their own journey of discovery. Moreover, if these informal and formal expressions of faith can be brought together in constructive dialogue, there is the potential for extensive learning by individuals and the whole Church.

A further positive effect of enabling people to express their thoughts, feelings and ordinary theology is that it has the potential to allow them to engage not only in positive statements about faith but also in areas that prove more problematic. The issue of bafflement has been discussed in relation to the work of John Hull. Cognitive dissonance often arises either when individuals move into different stages of their lives or when they have experiences which seem to point towards an understanding of God that is not apparently concurrent with what they have believed thus far. A Church that values the input of its everyday members will be prepared to listen to these issues and be open to the challenges and potential changes that they might bring not only to an individual's belief but also to its own collective belief. A Church that stands dogmatically by its teaching will struggle to respond to such issues in anything other than a defensive mode. Rather than

enforcing its doctrine and code of behaviour, a Church that listens is capable of change and open to the possibility of its own shortcomings.

The individual approach to adult religious learning starts where people are and recognises that personal perspective and experience are a significant influence on belief. It respects their own articulation of their belief and believes that it has an important part to play in conversation with other more formal expressions of faith. Astley writes of the importance of believers reaching the critical point when they embrace faith in its fullness by moving from the objective belief *that* God exists to the subjective belief *in* God (Astley, 2002:29). Recognising the value of the individual in faith helps this move from the objective to the subjective. Its focus on the person has the potential to allow powerful links to be made between faith and experience.

4.3.2.2 The Challenge To Adult Religious Learning

Parallels can once again be drawn between the challenges that this individual approach brings to adult religious learning and those brought by the contextual approach. If individual understanding is to be valued, the Church must acknowledge that faith needs to be flexible enough to accommodate a wide range of opinions and accept that its dominant pedagogy of direct learning, which seeks to teach from the outside, is ineffective alone. The main contrast between the contextual and individual approaches is the sheer number of different theological perspectives that occur within the latter. The consequence of holding individual opinions in high regard is that within the Church there can be as many theologies as there are people attending its worship. If this is extended to those beyond the Church, who are entitled to hold beliefs about God even if they are not Church members, then this number of theological opinions becomes infinite. Whilst this vast number of individual interpretations has the potential to give theology even greater depth if treated wisely, it also presents a significant challenge. It risks allowing theology to become so disparate that the Church's core identity could be dissolved within this vast ocean of different ways in which faith is discerned.

The challenge that the individual approach to everyday theologies brings to adult religious learning is threefold. First, the Church needs to consider how people can be encouraged to voice their own theological opinions freely. *Towards the Conversion of England* highlighted the hesitancy of laity to talk openly about their faith as a major barrier to the evangelism it sought. Astley recognises that a defining characteristic of ordinary theology is that it is tentative. People are uncomfortable in expressing their own thoughts about God because of their lack of formal qualifications and grasp the language that this entails. Hull also suggests that people do not feel able to talk about their experience of cognitive dissonance in some Church contexts. To express their bafflement would be to present an unacceptable challenge to the Church which might risk their exclusion from the community. This hesitancy, either from shame at a lack of formal theological knowledge or anxiety about the power of the institutional Church, continues to present a significant obstacle. The theological voice of the laity has been silenced. Parishes need to create the right environment in which people feel confident to talk openly about their own experience and personal views of faith.

Second, the Church must address the risk that too much focus on the individual could lead to faith becoming entirely subjective. It is inevitable that if individuals are encouraged to voice their own theological views, this will create instances of cognitive dissonance with other views expressed within the same community. One person's view of an aspect of faith and practice might be entirely incompatible with that of another. Equally, some of the views expressed might be contradictory to the most important tenets of Christianity. Parishes need to be aware of the collective 'red lines' of their faith which they are not prepared to cross. The limits of this discussion might be based, for example, around harmful discrimination, oppression, and exclusion. The danger in having these red lines, however, is that the Church reverts to being authoritarian. It is key for parishes to use a dialogical approach which does not belittle the person who has expressed their ideas and helps them to understand the issues, learn and change.

Third, valuing the individual brings a challenge to the Church itself. To what extent does the Church want to suppress individual theologies out of fear that they might threaten its own institutional identity? Or to what extent does it wish to view them as a valuable resource for its own development? A significant consequence of respecting and exploring individual beliefs and doubts is that the wider Church must be prepared to allow some of the most closely cherished elements of its corporate identity to be contested through the dialogue that takes place. A Church that listens to the individual must be a learning Church that is itself prepared to change in response to what it has heard.

4.3.2.3 The Individual And Renewal and Reform

Starting theology from the individual points towards a direction in adult religious learning that is not necessarily in line with the path being created by some elements of *Renewal and Reform*. The prominence given to driving numerical growth through evangelism risks moving the focus of the Church to a simpler, more authoritative message that can easily be communicated through a pedagogy that relies on direct learning. The defining characteristic of theologies that begin from the individual is that they are as numerous as the number of people who think about God. On the one hand, they bring a multitude of inconsistencies. On the other hand, they have a depth and breadth of thought that has the potential to create exciting dialogue that can challenge the Church and move its theology forward. Individual theologies, therefore, would pose difficulties for a simplified message.

The most important concern regards the development of the already committed Christian. The process of learning hinted at within *Developing Disciples* begins with piquing somebody's interest through apologetics, before drawing them into a teaching environment in which the simplified Christian message is communicated, and finally encouraging them to make a commitment. Having made a commitment, the role of the Christian is then to become an agent of the evangelistic process themselves, bringing others to make their own commitment. If this direction is pursued, there is a danger that space for Christians to continue their self-development beyond the moment of commitment could be limited.

Lifelong Christians need to engage with the challenges to faith that experience poses and explore their own emotional responses to faith. Learning to be evangelistic might be an important aspect of the Christian's journey but it should go hand-in-hand with constant reflection on our individual relationship with God and the greater understanding that this can bring. Indeed, greater personal understanding might contribute towards improved evangelism.

4.3.4 Practice

4.3.4.1 Theory

The three key aspects of everyday theologies are inseparable because they only find their true meaning in relationship with each other. The interconnected nature of the three central aspects of everyday theologies means that community context and individual experience will influence practice. Underlying the importance of practice is the assumption that key elements of a community's identity can be found within its actions. An important aspect of everyday theologies, therefore, is the investigation of its practices. These actions can point towards the theology that provides the foundation for the community's collective belief. This collective theology is expressed not only in what is said but also in what is done. There are two important considerations to be made when looking at practice. First, the theology contained within practice is often hidden to the extent that even those who participate might struggle to articulate the belief that lies behind it. Communities can be fully engaged in practices that they feel to be an integral part of their identity whilst at the same time struggling to explain them coherently.

Second, practice has a close relationship to praxis. Praxis is action that arises as a direct consequence of reflection on a theory or belief. That theory or belief requires its adherents to undertake actions that are concurrent with it. Praxis has a central role to play in Liberation Theology which is most closely related with the work of the South American theologians Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff and Jon Sobrino (Bevans, 2002:70ff). It creates a close link between theology and social change. Christian action (praxis) will inevitably take the side of the poor

and the oppressed and lead to the challenge of social structures. From a Christian perspective, the necessary outcome of right belief (orthodoxy) is right practice (orthopraxis). Christian praxis is action that is a conscious expression of faith. The actions of a community should arise from a process of putting its shared belief into practice. Communities that have not grasped the theology within their practice are not yet praxis-driven or are so only subconsciously. If a practice approach to theology is adopted, it will help communities to identify these hidden theologies and thereby move them towards praxis rather than practice.

A vital assumption of the practice-driven approach to everyday theologies is that there is an insoluble link between belief and action. The Saltley Trust's report, *What Helps Disciples Grow?* shows that participants felt that they had grown in faith from a huge range of different activities (Foster, 2016:8-10). Whilst some of the activities listed are group learning and courses, many revolve around participation in Church life and worship as well as relationships and social activities. This supports the argument that learning and growth in churches takes place in numerous practices that range far beyond the context of formal learning. People feel that practical and relational activities are a key part of Christian life and growth (ibid:15-16).

Within any faith community, therefore, there should be a continuous process of action, reflection on that action, followed by change and commitment to new or revised action. The process of reflection on action starts with the action itself. This is brought into dialogue with the context in which it takes place and faith traditions. The new understanding that is created from this dialogue forms the basis for new action. This is a never-ending process because as soon as one cycle of reflection comes to an end, a new one begins with the action that arose from the previous cycle as its subject. It sees theology as a constant process rather than something that is set in stone. God is revealed afresh within every turn of the cycle of reflection. Like the contextual approach, God is not seen to be far-removed from everyday life but is a central part of it, always open to being disclosed in new and challenging ways. Revelation, therefore, is not something that is restricted to past event. That past event is always being re-evaluated

through the lenses of present action. This constant process of theological re-evaluation is a vital part of informing future action.

Within the context of this thesis, the place of practice is connected strongly to the work of Grierson. His discussion of the church in which each week a group placed a vase of fresh flowers on the altar is an excellent example of finding theology within practice (see p38). There was substantial latent theology within this act. The minister's failure to investigate its significance, from its history to its current place within the church, led to hurt when he brought the practice to an end. The anger that was felt was also the result of the group being unable to give coherent expression to the deeply-felt theology that lay behind it. If the group responsible for the vase of flowers had been enabled to express the profound theological sentiment behind their action and explore how it related to Christian tradition, this conflict might have been avoided. The practice approach seeks to identify similar practices within communities that would benefit from further exploration. Grierson's process of naming, interpreting and remaking is once again of great use. Having identified a practice, it investigates it from every angle. It traces its historical development, establishes its meaning and uncovers how and why the practice has taken root within the community. Grierson's aim is to bring greater understanding to a practice so that ministers can be helped to make informed choices regarding its future. Yet for all its concern to understand congregations, Grierson's approach is focused primarily on the place of the minister. This thesis is concerned with how to form theologically engaged congregations. A key question is how Grierson's process might be transferred to adult religious learning so that congregations themselves can similarly reach a more informed position about what they do and why they do it.

4.3.4.2 The Challenge To Adult Religious Learning

The purpose of using a practice-based approach to theological learning in parishes would be to allow parishioners to explore the meaning that lies behind all that they do so that they can affirm or change their practice in a theologically well-informed manner. The aim is that parishes should not carry on doing what they have always done uncritically but come to understand the theology that acts

as the foundation for their action. This requires a starting point for adult religious learning which begins with the action of the community itself rather than bringing in knowledge from the outside. Communities need to be enabled to identify the aspects of their practice that would benefit from a full, community-based theological exploration. This initial identification might prove challenging because communities can be defensive of their long-standing practices to which many will be emotionally attached. A process of in-depth theological exploration could easily be interpreted as a threat. Uncovering the practices to be investigated should be done without confrontation. Facilitators should be aware that they are treading on hallowed ground and use open questions designed to scratch gently the surface of a particular practice and to guide the community towards asking pertinent questions of it themselves. Once a practice has been identified and fully described it can then be brought into creative dialogue with the history and traditions of faith and theology, both practical and theoretical which should lead to new, potentially transformative understanding which can bring about changes in practice.

A practice approach to adult religious learning in parishes brings significant challenge to current understanding in the Church of England. It calls into question the dependency on published courses which are imported into the parish context. Focussing on the actions of parishes means that these must be taken as the starting point for learning. The central assumption is that, if treated correctly, the practices of any parish contain sufficient theology to be the subject of learning itself. The process of unpacking the hidden, unarticulated theology within these practices and how it relates to Christian tradition is an important part of the learning process within this aspect of everyday theologies. Theological tradition and practice both have vital roles to play as dialogical partners whose purpose is to help lead parishes towards greater understanding.

4.3.4.3 Practice And Renewal and Reform

The direction encouraged by parts of *Renewal and Reform* suggests that an approach to adult religious learning in the Church of England that values practice within individual parishes might not be a priority. Some facets of *Renewal and*

Reform seem to support a pedagogy of direct learning. The courses that are associated with this pedagogy are easily accessible, attractively packaged and well marketed. There is a danger that they might be followed uncritically and consequently fail to allow participants to engage adequately with much beyond their own content. They might struggle to make meaningful connections with their audience by considering the specific needs of the parish context and the individuals within it. They might also have difficulties connecting with the theology that is already present within church communities, such as that hidden within its practices. There is much to be learnt from this theology within practice, both for individuals and also for the wider Church. Practice is where theology hits the ground, finding its purpose in action. The risk of focussing too much on the narrow aim of evangelism and numerical growth is that it could come at the expense of exploring the specific actions of individual parishes which give them unique character and depth. If a national, evangelistic agenda is pursued it might overlook the theological depth and breadth already present in parishes and the potential that can be brought to theological discourse by exploring this in detail.

Furthermore, some of the dangers of *Renewal and Reform* support the very approach to ministry that Grierson is working to avoid. Grierson's illustration of the vase of flowers should be a warning. This is an approach which fails to take account of the importance of local practices and brings change into parishes from the outside. Too much focus on an evangelistic, numbers-orientated understanding of Church which is imposed from the outside risks paying insufficient attention to the intricacies and peculiarities local practices.

4.3.4 Summary

The three aspects of everyday theologies most relevant to adult religious learning – context, individual, and practice – have been explored along with the challenges they bring to current practice and to *Renewal and Reform*. It has been argued that current practice and some key elements of *Renewal and Reform* might struggle to incorporate the perspectives brought by everyday theologies. The importance lies in the dialogical understanding that underpins everyday theologies. Dialogue is at the centre of the incorporation of everyday theologies

into religious learning. The naming and description of important features of social and cultural context, personal experience and theological views, and religious practices is a vital part of this dialogue. They are brought into a mutually creative conversation with the theological, scriptural, liturgical, and ecclesial traditions of the Church so that understanding can be deepened, new perspectives opened, and new paths of action discerned. It is important to stress that to value the contextual, personal, and practical is not to belittle tradition. It is, moreover, to see tradition not as an untouchable body of beliefs but as a partner in dialogue that can lead to greater understanding of both the tradition and also the present situation. The locus of effective religious learning occurs within this creative dialogue rather than within the act of learning about the Church's traditions. The purpose of the dialogue is to bring these different elements together so that change can be affected. In the Church context, this dialogue might bring about change in those who participate as well as change in the wider organisation.

Reflection on some of the key aspects of *Renewal and Reform* that relate to adult religious learning indicate the possibility that they might be less open to such dialogue. The potential cycle of evangelism, that seems to move the evangelised to the role of evangelists at the point of commitment, might limit the Church's educational horizons. Its primary focus appears to be the formation of evangelists to draw in prospective new Christians rather than the growth of theological understanding amongst Church membership, although these are not mutually exclusive. In this move towards communicating a more simplified and accessible message, it might struggle to take into account the influence of outside factors, in particular the local peculiarities and individual opinions at the heart of everyday theologies. This direction is hinted at by the desire to produce a revised catechism and more published material to support the Church's evangelistic enterprise. This is symbolic of an understanding of faith learning which continues to be based in a pedagogy of direct learning which brings with it a number of dangers. An over-emphasis on direct learning risks moving towards Freire's model of banking learning in which Christianity might be condensed to an objective body of beliefs that is passed from one group of people to another. If this were to be the case, these beliefs and those who practice them will find it increasingly difficult to engage with the issues that are raised by the world in

which they operate. Rather than being a Church that exists in and for the world and its people, able to respond to their ever-evolving needs, a Church that travels in this direction would possibly become more cultic, removed from the influences of the world and defensive of its traditions.

4.4 Practical Considerations

It is important to reflect on the implications for the practice of adult religious learning in parishes. Groupwork should continue to play an important role in allowing churches to engage with learning which is focused on everyday theologies. It has been discussed through Grainger that groupwork already plays a central role in learning in the Church of England but that the content of these groups is centred predominantly on direct learning (see pp42ff). The conversations held within parish groupwork should be more open to new opinions and information expressed both by members of the group and also by those beyond the church community, be prepared to adopt a critical viewpoint to the subject of the group's discussion and strike the right balance between formative and critical learning. Parishes should be encouraged to move away from content-based material and be prepared to use the collective and individual experience of those in the group as the starting point for learning from which they can move towards dialogue with Church tradition and practice. Three areas of groupwork that reflect the three key characteristics of everyday theologies of context, individual, and practice might be introduced into the parish learning pattern. Each type of groupwork would need to adopt a process whose aim should be to open new perspectives on personal faith, practice, and formal/normative theologies.

4.4.1 Contextual Groupwork

Contextual groupwork would reflect the influence of context on local expressions of faith and understanding of theology. Conversation would be structured around the theory of contextual theology. The process might be a practical adaptation of the three steps of contextual theology mentioned above (present, past, and future) and Grierson's process of naming, interpreting, and remaking. A first stage in this process would be for the group to identify the most influential

contextual aspects external to the church community alongside the most important elements of its internal life. These are likely to be areas that present specific challenges or sit uneasily in the life of the parish. Having identified these issues, a second stage would be for the group to investigate them in detail, seeking to comprehend their development and roots in the community's past. These first two stages establish the facts surrounding the issues and create a detailed description. This informs the third stage where creative dialogue occurs which attempts to establish how the context affects the theology within it and vice versa. It is where new avenues of theological understanding are opened. The fourth stage would be to consider how this new contextual learning might affect the church's response. This might precipitate change in practice, attitude, or recognition of new and different ways in which God relates to the world and the parish concerned. As mentioned in the discussion of context, it might be beneficial to involve local people from beyond the church community in the dialogue. This might open up different perspectives, particularly in conversations about the wider community.

4.4.2 Ordinary Theology Groupwork

Groupwork based around ordinary theology would be a valuable resource for the exploration of the individual aspect of everyday theologies. In order to overcome the hesitancy natural to ordinary theology, these groups would need to create an environment in which participants feel sufficiently comfortable to express their own theological views and struggles. Group members would need to know each other well and see each other as equals in order to build an atmosphere of trust. They should also be at ease with allowing their views to be subjected to the creative and constructive criticism of their peers. Groups might decide to validate these ideas, reject them or decide that a meaningful conclusion cannot be drawn. The aim of this criticism is to create dialogue that can move forward both an individual's own understanding and also a church's collective belief. Theology, therefore, becomes a mutually creative process in which everybody has a stake. The process of this groupwork might be to take an aspect of Christian theology, heritage, or practice that the group finds either compelling or baffling. First, individual opinions and comprehension of the area would be elicited and brought

into conversation with each other with a particular emphasis on relevant experiences. Second, these would be brought into dialogue with received Church understanding, robustly critiquing both the expressions of ordinary theology and also the relevant formative/normal theology. Once again, the aim of this dialogue would be to open up new perspectives on the areas under discussion. A third stage for the group would be to assess the implications of their dialogue on personal and collective faith and the ways in which they are expressed.

The ultimate aim of these ordinary theology groups would be to make this approach a widely accepted part of parish life in which hesitancy is overcome and it is seen as normal practice. Whilst groupwork might be the ideal method for exploring ordinary theology, there may well continue to be those who remain reluctant to express their personal views. For such people, parishes might elicit their opinions through one-on-one meetings that adopt a non-confrontational, therapeutic approach.

4.4.3 *Praxis Groups*

The aim of praxis groups would be to move parish communities towards greater understanding of how their practice and their belief shape each other. The purpose would be to form churches whose members are more conscious of the theology that is contained within their actions. This would allow parishes to consider their current practice and be more reflective and informed about it. It would also provide them with a framework within which they can explore possibilities for change and new initiatives, ensuring that future practice continues to be moulded from their belief. This would lead them towards becoming praxis-based communities. A similar process to that suggested for investigating context might be used with groups to investigate practice. This would follow four stages. First a practice would be identified. Second, its development and relationship to the parish's part would be explored. Third, it would be brought into critical dialogue with faith traditions. Fourth, a way forward would be sought that emerges from this dialogue. Once again, the pattern of such group work would be to draw out the individual and communal understanding of a practice before introducing the normative/formal aspects into the conversation. Alternatively, the

practical basis for this dialogue might be found in the rich material of theories of practical theology and models of theological reflection, such as the Pastoral Cycle and critical correlation (Tracy, 1975; Browning, 1991; Graham et al, 2005a and b; Green, 2009). The overall purpose of these groups would be to create an ongoing process of reflection-in-action.

4.4.4 Culture Change And Resourcing

A major obstacle to the development of these three approaches to groupwork in parishes is that a significant culture change would be required in the Church of England. It has been argued that, although there were some significant changes to learning practice during the twentieth century, in recent years it has become increasingly dependent on content-based, catechetical material predominantly based in direct learning. The lifelong element of Christian learning, whilst recognised, has received relatively limited support. The proposed types of groupwork would require an investment in lifelong learning. They would lessen the dependency on direct learning and would potentially create space for committed Christians to make a greater contribution to the theological and ecclesiological dialogue that might shape the Church's future locally and nationally.

A further complication would be that this groupwork would require careful facilitation. Facilitators would need to be trained not only in the processes to be used in each type of groupwork but also in approaches that would allow participants to express their own opinions freely. Parishes could be provided with the resources to train 'everyday theology practitioners' from within their congregations whose role would be to enable open, theological discussion and to steer away from traces of church authoritarianism that might stifle individual voices.

4.5 Consequences For Adult Religious Learning

Everyday theologies have great potential in the future of adult religious learning. A key principle of allowing everyday theologies to influence church-based

learning is that the needs and beliefs of individuals and communities should be valued very highly. All everyday theologies start with people's everyday lives, building greater understanding through dialogue between experience and faith tradition. As a result, theology can no longer be seen to be imposed from the outside or remote from lived experience as individuals or in communities. Everyday theologies lead theology towards becoming an integral part of the practice of Christianity common to all believers. If they are taken seriously, theology can be an ongoing dialogue to which everyone has the possibility to contribute. The understanding that emerges from the conversation between the everyday and tradition can be owned by all those who participate. Theology can, therefore, become an inclusive enterprise in which all Christians have a vested interest. It can be owned by the whole Church rather than a few exclusive parts of it, thereby empowering the laity and possibly bridging the gulf with clergy. The Church, however, needs to create the circumstances in which such dialogue can take place.

This represents a significant challenge to the Church of England. If everyday theologies are to influence the future of parish-based adult religious learning, the direction of the Church's current approach needs to be reviewed. First, everyday theologies value the local and particular over the universal and general. Recent practice in the Church of England and some of the language emerging from *Renewal and Reform* seem to value the latter over the former. The generic courses that currently dominate religious learning in churches are meant to be delivered in a way that is broadly consistent across all learning contexts, although it is highly likely that practice varies considerably. They aim to direct participants towards a common Christian message which each course considers to be a curriculum of so-called 'Christian basics'. A greater emphasis on everyday theologies, however, means that the Church would need to be more open to multiple theological interpretations, appreciating variety of theology over consistency. Everyday theologies recognise that experiences of God vary significantly between communities and individuals. It has been argued that each of these different positions has an intrinsic theological value and thereby deserves being listened to. These are theological opinions that have usually been arrived at as responses to the unique experiences of individuals and

communities. These everyday theologies might regularly clash but this should not mean that one position should be accepted at the expense of another. Each has merit as a legitimate response to God in its own specific context and circumstances. A Church that is able to champion everyday theologies is also one that can promote a theological polyphony. This would be a Church that is content to live with the variety and inconsistency brought by these multiple theological voices and that thrives in the opportunities that they bring for new learning arising out of dialogue with faith traditions. This variety poses a significant challenge to any approach that stresses the communication of a more consistent message.

Second, a consequence of following the path of everyday theologies and its associated polyphony is a distancing from the widely distributed, published courses that are currently extensively used by parishes along with diocesan material. Grainger's argument that the chief concern of these courses is to transmit their own framework of Christian interpretation means that they might struggle to engage with the local and personal nature of everyday theologies. Although parishes often adapt material, if *Alpha's* use of copyright in an attempt to control the way in which the course is delivered and the publication of suggested answers to predicted questions were to be replicated by other courses, this might suggest a trend within the Church towards an increasingly prescribed, centralised message. These courses are not designed to respond to a variety of different contexts and experiences and the distinctive challenges that they bring. Structured around their pre-determined themes, if followed uncritically, they dictate the content and delivery of course sessions and direct participants towards their own desired outcomes. Although there is usually time for discussion, space to respond specifically to the individual and community needs which form the starting point for everyday theologies is limited. Parishes need to be enabled to find ways in which they can best engage with the everyday theologies of their context and create opportunities for exploration and dialogue. They need the resources and support to create their own context-specific learning material whose purpose would be to open up local theological discourse and allow the expression and exploration of their deeply-held beliefs. At first sight, the relevant *Renewal and Reform* streams appear to support the creation of more

generic material for parish use, such as more published courses and the development of a new catechism. Unless these materials adopt a changed pedagogical approach, they will continue to struggle to incorporate everyday theologies into the parish learning environment.

Third, a change to a more inclusive and varied understanding of theology within Church-based learning will require the Church to limit its use of direct learning. To a certain extent, the Church is the guardian of the content of faith which it has a responsibility to transmit. The use of direct learning stresses a view that a major part of the Church's role is to pass on this message to those who do not yet believe. This has led to the use of language in *Renewal and Reform* that one of the Church's fundamental tasks is to *tell* others about Jesus. Combined with the use of direct learning, this act of *telling* is concerned with one-way communication. It might easily be assumed that the person who is being told does not yet know this information and is like an empty receptacle waiting to be filled. The danger of this scenario is that the teacher might have complete control over the learning content. Valuing everyday theologies is a more democratic approach to theology and would make such control difficult. It would encourage the Church to listen more to its members, allowing their own experiences of life and community to shape the future of theology. This change in pedagogy requires learners to be active participants in theological discourse. It requires teachers to be those who primarily facilitate discourse and enable the expression of personal and communal theologies rather than those who simply transmit knowledge.

Fourth, the Church needs to demonstrate a greater awareness of the complexities that surround being one of its members, in particular the oblique learning that takes place through participation in the life and worship of a parish community and how this is subsequently experienced and interpreted within individual lives. Off-the-shelf courses and 'Christian basics' tend to restrict the horizon of learning to engagement with their relatively limited, controlled curriculum. Everyday theologies suggest that belief is considerably more complex. The Church needs to ensure that it steers away from the idea that non-Christians are empty receptacles waiting to be filled with faith along with the

underlying assumption that those who have no faith do not think theologically. If these attitudes are adopted, they would belittle those with whom the Church is trying to communicate and do much to bolster the belief that theology is the reserve of the academy and the seminary. The Church needs to see its members less as objects for communication and more as the subjects of its own theological development and collaborators in its mission to deepen understanding of God. Some of the language of *Renewal and Reform* and its concern to build the Church numerically, however, might risk it manoeuvring in the direction of seeing people more as objects than subjects. Whilst it seeks to use current members to communicate faith to the world beyond the Church, it should also discover what those who play a regular part in its activities might have to offer theological discourse.

Underneath these issues of religious learning in the Church are a number of questions regarding ecclesial identity. Before any change in approach to religious learning, the Church of England has to consider the type of Church it wants to be. Returning to the language of Hull, does the Church of England see its future being shaped by more restrictive, henotheistic concerns or by all-encompassing, monotheistic concerns? The approach towards learning favoured by the Church can tell much about its self-understanding. As previously argued, formative learning should be an important part of Church education but it should be balanced with a suitably critical approach. The more that the Church relies on a one-way approach to learning, the less it will be open to question and challenge along with the climate of exploration that this might bring. Without balance, the long-term consequences might be that it would increasingly seek to preserve its body of belief at all costs, even when facing profound ideological challenges. Gradually more dogmatic, it might feel a need to defend itself against outside influence and the perceived threat of change that this would bring. It could possibly lead to the boundaries between Church and world being strengthened and membership being defined principally by agreement to and upholding of the institution's rules and regulations. At its extreme, this is a Church that might create a climate in which the authority of its teaching cannot be contested for fear of exclusion. A Church that grounds its pedagogy in the mutual ownership of its theology, however, would be one that might favour using

questions that stem from doubt and bafflement within experience as a way into dialogue with faith traditions. The purpose of this dialogue would be to renew its collective understanding of God. This might lead the Church to see theology as something that needs to be constantly re-assessed in response to ever shifting context and experience, using everyday theologies as a resource. This would be more reflective of Hull's monotheistic Church that is capable of learning from all that it encounters.

Conclusion

Key Points

This thesis began by asking whether explaining faith provides a sufficiently robust premise for high quality adult religious learning in the Church of England. Is it employing an empty ‘megaphone theology’ that is bellowed at passers-by, or is it engaging with the more intricate theologies shaped by individual and contextual needs as well as practice?

The reflection on everyday theologies illustrated by the work of Hull, Astley, Grierson and Grainger, the overview of the most relevant developments in the Church of England since 1945 from *Towards the Conversion of England* (1945) to *Mission-Shaped Church* (2004), the examination of the content and initiatives of *Renewal and Reform*, and the correlation between them has led to two principle conclusions. First, explaining faith is not enough. Everyday theologies show that adult religious learning is extremely complex and requires a far more nuanced approach than direct explanation to be successful. Second, through its growing emphasis on increasing attendance by methods of intentional evangelism which champion the explanation of faith within its understanding of learning, the Church of England appears to be following a route that could be contrary to the direction suggested by everyday theologies and proposed by this thesis.

These two conclusions can be expounded on further by returning to the five questions asked in the Introduction that guided the overall discussion (see pp16-17):

1. *If ordinary theology is important, are there any other theological approaches that similarly value experience and individual interpretation?*

Astley’s concept of ordinary theology – that of individuals who have received no formal theological education – provided the jumping off point for this discussion. As a personal theology, ordinary theology is shaped in response

to an individual's personal circumstances and can be profoundly influential on the development of their faith. If personal experiences shape an individual's theology, then they can also provide rich resources for religious learning and opportunities to make profound connections between life and faith. Times of bafflement and transition between stages of life are potential moments of profound learning as people attempt to integrate them with their belief.

Other theological approaches that similarly value experience are based in the community rather than the individual. First, contextual theologies seek to understand how a community's expression of faith is moulded both by the particularities of its physical, environmental, demographic, and socio-political circumstances as well as its shared experiences. Second, the theology of practice is concerned with how a community's actions, such as liturgy, social action, and community events, might point to its deeply held theological convictions.

The common thread between individual and community theologies is that they are usually latent. People are hesitant to express personal theological views and describe their struggles with faith. Communities rarely take time to explore their shared identity that is contained in their actions and moulded by their context. This does not mean, however, that they are any less important than formal and normative theologies.

2. How prepared is the wider Church of England to accept the importance of ordinary theology and any other associated theologies?

Although it has been argued that the everyday theologies of individuals and communities are fundamental to the way in which faith is understood, they have been undervalued and underexplored by the Church of England. The hesitancy to express personally-held theological views exposes the long-established rift between academic and clerical experts, who are the perceived guardians and arbiters of all things theological, and laity. This has suppressed the theological voice of the individual and the local community. To value everyday theologies and place the contribution of the individual and the local

community on a par with that of academic theology and tradition would require a paradigm shift. Whilst developments since 1945 have shown a move towards groupwork, exploratory participatory styles of learning, and greater opportunities for individuals to participate, methods remain grounded primarily in direct learning. The emphasis on 'Christian basics' courses since the 1990s might suggest a move back towards a more systematic approach to learning Christian doctrine, although these courses do use groupwork and include space for discussion. This move might arise from the increased focus on evangelism in the face of ongoing numerical decline and a perceived need to simplify the way in which the content of faith is communicated to non-believers. The bid to be more accessible, however, might come at the expense of the deeper theological exploration that engaging with everyday theologies could bring.

3. *How might these theologies affect the practice of adult religious learning in the Church of England?*

Using the everyday theologies of individuals and communities within adult religious learning significantly challenges current approaches. At present, the Church's prevailing pedagogy is direct learning. Explaining Christianity is the singular aim of the popular published courses that have dominated learning in parishes for the past twenty-five years. Adopted by parishes for ease of implementation and at times through the power of marketing, these courses promote their own theological agenda rather than engaging with local and individual needs. Valuing everyday theologies would encourage parishes to dispense with this model in favour of a dialogical approach that starts with the parish context and individual experience and moves towards tradition in order to address the place of faith from within them. It would lead to a more varied pedagogical approach which would at times still use direct learning but alongside other methods whose purpose is to advance learning in an explicitly experiential way.

4. *To what extent are the current situation in the Church of England and attempts to reform it open to the potential that these theological approaches might bring?*

The far-reaching *Renewal and Reform* programme of transformation in the Church of England is likely to dominate its agenda in the coming decades. Examination of the reports and papers that have been submitted to General Synod clearly suggests that a move away from the pedagogy of direct learning towards an approach that incorporates everyday theologies is unlikely. The desire of Church leadership to grow attendance has led it to focus its educational efforts almost exclusively on recruiting new members through intentional evangelism. This has two important consequences. First, *Renewal and Reform* promotes the use of approaches and materials that continue to support direct learning. This includes the use of published courses, such as those already widely used and the development of a new catechism. Second, this concentration on evangelisation risks being at the expense of the continuing learning of those who already committed churchgoers. Their role is in danger of being predominantly focused on evangelising others as they become tools for the recruitment of new members. This evidence demonstrates that the Church might be adopting a strategy that prioritises numbers ahead of developing theological understanding and ongoing individual and community formation. This is unlikely to be open to the challenges that everyday theologies bring.

5. *What might a programme of religious learning that reflects the bias of these theological approaches look like?*

Religious learning that reflects everyday theologies will incorporate the four principles outlined at the end of Chapter 2 (see pp47-8). Theology is to be found as much within individual lives and communities as it is within the seminary and the academy. Churches need to provide an environment in which issues raised by experiences of life and faith, from instances of cognitive dissonance to notable events in a community, can be openly

expressed and discussed. Central to this is the need to work with groups and individuals over a considerably longer period than that of the often time-bound published courses so that these areas can be fully explored. Continuous learning enables engagement with people at key stages of their lives. The importance of the latent learning that takes place within the hidden curriculum of a church community also needs to be recognised, addressing how context and practice contribute towards the learning process. A much more varied pedagogical approach needs to be adopted across the whole Church. Overall, parishes need to move away from the idea that adult learning is based predominantly on telling to one that is concerned far more with the building of meaning and understanding starting with individual and communal experience. The purpose of this is to enable people to move from a more objective *belief that* towards a more subjective and all-encompassing *belief in*.

The answers to these questions provide further support for the conclusions that the Church is continuing to follow a flawed dependency on direct learning.

Further Themes

The initial questions presented in the Introduction have been answered but some other important themes have emerged during this research. First, the Church of England's move to focus its resources on numerical growth through evangelism risks fundamentally changing its ecclesiology. This is shown by the growing distinction between members and non-members and is illustrated by language that encourages 'insiders' to convert 'outsiders'. There is a danger that the Church of England will gradually move away from being an all-encompassing, inclusive body with fluid membership and boundaries towards an increasingly cultic, members-only institution that exists exclusively for those who subscribe to its beliefs. Stronger boundaries emphasise the division between insiders and outsiders and risk making the institution more like a sect, thereby distancing it from the world that surrounds it. Such a henotheistic Church will potentially become increasingly irrelevant to non-members and its members and their beliefs

will become curiosities. It would seek to communicate its message to the outside but its strong boundaries would isolate it from learning from wider society. If these changes take hold over the longer term, they would significantly change the ecclesiological identity of the Church of England. Alienated from outside influence, theology would possibly be paralysed because the Church would no longer be equipped to respond to the world around it.

The second theme is that of latent learning. The main focus of the Church's present evangelistic endeavours is on explicit efforts to educate non-Christians about faith with a view to converting them. The content of these attempts to educate is often simplified and delivered through courses. This thesis, however, has consistently asserted that learning in the Church is much more complex than these simplified models assume. Whilst these courses convey information for individuals to assimilate, much learning in the Church takes place not in the classroom but as a secondary result of taking part in different aspects of parish life. It has been argued that the practices of any Church contain implicit theology. People learn about God through the theology that is contained in the way in which liturgy is practised and how communities respond to their faith in many other ways. This is latent learning because it is an unintended product of participation in Church practices. It is important, therefore, for parishes to be aware of the theology that they communicate in what they say and in what they do because people learn obliquely from observing and participating in their activities. Concentrating predominantly on intentional evangelism would be a narrow-minded, one-dimensional approach to learning in the Church. An improved understanding of how learning takes place in hidden ways would vastly improve the Church's pedagogy.

Third, the Church's desire to present a simplified faith to outsiders assumes that its product will be equally attractive to different individuals and communities. It also assumes that the agenda of numerical growth is likewise valid in every parish. This thesis has constantly returned to the importance of personal and community context. A crucial principle is that neither an individual nor a community can be developed without first understanding it. Like trying to cultivate plants in the wrong climate or soil, imposing an external agenda on a parish is

highly unlikely to enable it to flourish. To help an individual to grow their faith or respond to bafflement requires an understanding of all that has brought them to their present situation. Similarly, to help a community to grow in faith entails an in-depth knowledge of everything from its past that has contributed towards its present. Understanding background is a vital part of the process of learning about faith. It can lead to a greater awareness of how individual and communal circumstances significantly influence our responses to God and should be an essential part of the cultivation of a thriving faith.

Fourth, despite its presentation as a new and creative initiative to numerical decline, much of the Church of England's programme of transformation within *Renewal and Reform* is far from it. The origins of many of the key initiatives, including refocusing the Church's energy on evangelism, enabling laity to undertake a more active role centred on evangelism and witness, and revisiting clergy training to equip them for a more evangelistic role, are to be found in the unimplemented 1945 report, *Towards the Conversion of England*. These initiatives also fall short from a theological perspective. Theology should underpin them but is given no more than a passing glance. Moreover, the current strategy to re-orientate the majority of its work towards intentional evangelism is grounded principally in a pragmatic, managerial response to the continuing fall in attendance. *Renewal and Reform* might be seen as an attempt to save the institutional Church at the expense of a Church which is properly, theologically engaged with the people and the communities amongst which it works.

The Consequences For *Renewal and Reform*

Examining *Renewal and Reform* in the context of this discussion about adult religious learning has exposed some critical flaws in its reports and initiatives. The overwhelming emphasis on numerical growth makes numbers and membership the most important criteria against which its success is judged. With the drive to push attendance upwards and the relocation of financial and human resources to achieve it, the Church risks becoming a slave to attendance statistics. Many valuable aspects of parish could potentially fall by the wayside

because they do not share this emphasis on growth. Although the approach of *Renewal and Reform* is for the Church to reach more people, the henotheistic boundaries which it is in danger of building would make the Church increasingly sectarian and less accessible to the outside world. The lack of robust theological foundations to *Renewal and Reform* means that it lacks the theological integrity on which such a wide-ranging programme should be based. This dearth of comprehensive theological reflection behind *Renewal and Reform* is the most concerning of its shortfalls. Without full and proper engagement with theology, *Renewal and Reform* can be nothing more than a managerial response to an institutional problem.

These flaws raise some crucial questions for the future of *Renewal and Reform* and, indeed, the Church of England itself. This is not to say that the Church should ignore the consistent, long-term decline in attendance. This raises many issues that have needed to be addressed for a long time. Although it is right that action should be taken, the Church is running the risk of rushing headlong into a programme of transformation that has not been fully thought through and stands to change it beyond recognition. Concerning adult religious learning, this thesis advocates an approach to learning which is concerned with working alongside individuals and communities, appreciating the peculiarities of their different contexts, and enabling them to explore the place of God in their lives by bringing these experiences into a creative and transformative dialogue with received faith tradition. The elements of *Renewal and Reform* that have been considered question the extent to which this vision for learning can be realised in the current climate. The apparent focus of evangelism suggests that the theological development encouraged by everyday theologies might not be prioritised as hoped.

Next Steps

This research has brought the theories of everyday theologies into conversation with the Church's current practice of adult religious learning. In doing so, it has opened up possible new avenues for the practice of adult learning. It has also

challenged the current direction of the Church of England seen in *Renewal and Reform*. There are two directions in which this research might proceed. One continues to focus on learning, whilst the other concentrates on ecclesiology.

The first direction involves trialling the proposals about learning from this research in the parish context. These suggestions are based in theory and need to be tested in practice. The overarching aim of such research would be to create a framework within which parishes could be enabled to form programmes that reflect their contextual needs and can thereby bring about deeper learning. This would involve using empirical research methods to assess the effectiveness of such approaches and to establish the best methods through which they can be achieved. There are several possible routes, each of which reflects the different aspects of the impact of everyday theologies. It could involve investigating the most valuable ways in which individuals might be encouraged to express their ordinary theology within parish-based groups that are structured to encourage openness. Individuals could also be worked with on a one-to-one basis, allowing them to explore how their personal context has shaped their faith and enabling them to consider how they might deepen their faith in the future. Church communities might be worked with in two ways. They could be guided in an evaluation of their context so that they can understand better how important characteristics of the wider communities in which they are based have led their parish to its present situation. Parishes could also be directed through a process of identifying and examining their key practices so that the theology that motivates them can be understood far better. The overall purpose of working with individuals and communities in this way would be to bring latent theological outlooks to the fore and to incorporate them into wider theological discourse as well as to highlight where oblique learning takes place.

The second direction in which this research might be taken forward would be to concentrate on the ecclesiological angle. The argument has been that if the Church of England follows the bias of the *Renewal and Reform* programme towards intentional evangelism, it will lead to the creation of an increasingly sectarian outlook. It risks becoming a Church that is ever more isolated from the society in which it is based. To what extent, however, might any change be

evaluated? This could be achieved through the empirical study of several parishes from different contexts and traditions which are moving in the ecclesiological direction proposed by *Renewal and Reform*. It would consider how these parishes are being affected as a consequence of their change in approach. It would look at the impact of the emphasis on intentional evangelism and how this is interpreted in the different contexts. It would examine the effect on attendance and the extent to which this might be changing the balance and outlook of congregations. The purpose of following this ecclesiological path would be to establish whether the concerns discussed in this thesis are well grounded.

Final Word

This research set out to assess certain issues in adult religious learning in the Church of England through the analysis of significant recent reports and resources which have a bearing on it. These have been criticised through the theory of everyday theologies and the prominence that they give to individuals, communities and their experiences. The thesis has argued in favour of an approach to learning that is formed around the particularities of local parishes as opposed to the generic, one-size-fits-all nature of the published courses that currently dominate learning. It has also shed light on the immense complexity of the theological enterprise. Theology is formed in a wide range of locations that stretch far beyond the widely-held view that it is the sole property of academics and clergy. Personal and communal experiences can lead to a variety of contextual theological responses that do not always easily square with the Church's formal and normative theologies. The nature of theology is that it is held in universal ownership and every voice deserves to be given equal standing even when the multitude of views expressed bring particularly difficult challenges. The more informal theological voices have, however, too often remained hidden. The Church needs to do more to reveal these latent voices and to bring them into dialogue with its tradition.

The most important place for theology is where all these different voices come together in dialogue. This is the meeting point of the variety of theological interpretations and the questions and experiences that drive them. They are brought together in a creative conversation whose aim is to forge new understandings that equip the Church to respond better to ever-changing communal and individual experiences. These experiences generate the questions and opinions which should form the coal face of parish-based adult religious learning because they can stimulate exciting and potentially transformative dialogue for both the Church and also individuals. Adult religious learning should not be about a one-way explanation of simplified and attractive but ultimately fossilised and inflexible faith. It should be about a creative conversation that constantly seeks to grow the ways in which God is understood and how faith and the Church can continue to be an integral part of our world.

It is to be regretted that the Church of England seems intent on following a direction that will lead it towards assuming the characteristics of the man with a megaphone. Loudly proclaiming a message that is meaningless to those it hopes will listen, the Church risks being ignored and even ridiculed because of its inability to engage with the concerns and issues of society. If it follows this path, the Church might be reduced to an eccentric curiosity, looking progressively more inwards and serving the needs of the institution and its members at the expense of the world and the people it is called to serve, to whom it appears irrelevant. These ecclesiological consequences need to be urgently addressed by the leadership of the Church of England. Without doing so, their actions stand to have the opposite effect to that which is intended.

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Appendix A: In Each Generation - A Programme For Reform And Renewal (GS1976)

1. In obedience to the commission that Jesus gave to his disciples the Church's vocation is to proclaim the good news afresh in each generation. As disciples of our Risen Lord we are called to be loyal to the inheritance of faith which we have received and open to God's Spirit so that we can be constantly renewed and reformed for the task entrusted to us.
2. The spiritual challenge of reform and renewal is both personal and institutional. A year ago we encouraged the creation of a number of task groups to discern what has been happening in parishes and dioceses, to ponder the implications of the From Anecdote to Evidence findings and to reflect on the experience dioceses have had in developing their mission and ministry. The groups were asked to explore specific aspects of the institutional life of the Church of England, where on the face of it, there appeared to be scope for significant change.
3. The work of these four groups - on the discernment and nurture of those called to posts of wide responsibility, on resourcing ministerial education, on the future deployment of our resources more generally and on simplification - is now being published. It will be the main focus for the February meeting of the General Synod.
4. We are grateful for this opportunity to put on record our thanks to Lord Green, the Bishop of Sheffield, John Spence and the Bishop of Willesden for chairing each of the four groups. We are also grateful to the chief officers of the Archbishops' Council, Church Commissioners and Pensions Board for their review of the work of the National Church Institutions, a copy of which is also being circulated for information.
5. Renewing and reforming aspects of our institutional life is a necessary but far from sufficient response to the challenges facing the Church of England. The recommendations of these four groups have to be seen in a much wider context, as a means not an end. They will be considered at the Synod in the light of a paper that explores what it means for all Christians, lay and ordained, to be a community of missionary disciples.
6. They also need to be approached against the background of the wider range of ongoing work to promote numerical and spiritual growth, contribute to the common good and reimagine ministry. We are continually encouraged in our visits to parishes and dioceses by the many signs of life and growth in the numbers of people coming to faith and growing in faith. General Synod welcomed in November 2013 the creation of an Archbishops' Task Group on Intentional Evangelism. This group will be producing its first report in the next few months.
7. Meanwhile the Church of England continues to have a significant impact in all kinds of positive ways in the life of the nation. There is a remarkable breadth and quality of service and commitment offered through community ventures, food banks, credit unions and many other initiatives through cathedrals, parish churches, and fresh expressions of church. There are sure grounds for hope both in the grace of God and in the dedication of God's people.
8. The urgency of the challenge facing us is not in doubt. Attendance at Church of England services has declined at an average of 1% per annum

over recent decades and, in addition, the age profile of our membership has become significantly older than that of the population. Finances have been relatively stable, thanks to increased individual giving. This situation cannot, however, be expected to continue unless the decline in membership is reversed.

9. The age profile of our clergy has also been increasing. Around 40% of parish clergy are due to retire over the next decade or so. And while ordination rates have held up well over recent years they continue to be well below what would be needed to maintain current clergy numbers and meet diocesan ambitions.
10. The burden of church buildings weighs heavily and reorganisation at parish level is complicated by current procedures. The Sheffield formula allocation of priests is no longer generally observed, while the distribution of funds under the Darlow Formula has no emphasis on growth, has no relationship to deprivation and involves no mutual accountability. There is no central investment in reaching out into the digital and social media world. If the Church of England is to return to growth, there is a compelling need to realign resources and work carefully to ensure that scarce funds are used to best effect.
11. The four task groups whose reports are now being published each identifies changes which are designed to enable the Church of England to be better equipped for meeting the challenges that it faces.
12. The report on the discernment and nurture of those whom the church identifies as called to posts of wide responsibility has a number of aims. It seeks to ensure proper care for those involved, a genuine diversity in those available for appointment, excellent theological and spiritual preparation and a familiarity with the key elements necessary for day to day working.
13. The Resourcing Ministerial Education report explains why we must also be more prayerful and proactive in our approach to promoting vocations to full time ministry - lay and ordained. That includes seeking a significant and sustained increase in the numbers of those coming forward for full time ordained ministry.
14. The report sets out proposals for continuing to grow the number and quality of candidates, for improving their formation - both pre - and post-ordination - and for sustaining them in the ministry to which God has called them. We need to make it easier to enable a proper diversity of candidates to be identified and called. New investment in lay ministry and leadership is essential. To support parish and diocesan efforts, we must consider national initiatives for lay development.
15. There can be no single strategy for the Church of England's mission and ministry. The proposals have been developed in the light of what bishops and dioceses said when consulted. There will continue to be 42 diocesan strategies, each of which are entitled to national support. In developing and supporting leaders, we must ensure they are equipped and can call on the expertise they need. We want to consider how funds might be made available which dioceses can use to further their plans to achieve numerical and spiritual growth.
16. As the Resourcing the Future report explains, church funds distributed from the nationally managed endowment are a small part of total church resources. But they still need to be used for critical impact. The report

- proposes the replacement of the Darlow Formula with allocations based on population, income and deprivation levels, and the creation of a new funding stream available for growth initiatives. In short, such funds will have a bias to the poor and a commitment to spiritual and numerical growth.
17. The fostering of mutual support and mutual accountability is at the heart of the proposals. The release of funds is linked to clear plans for their use and clear eyed review of their impact, as judged and monitored by peer groups. The report notes that, while the Sheffield Formula no longer works, there will continue to be a need for arrangements to ensure an equitable distribution of stipendiary curates.
 18. The Simplification report identifies specific legislative changes which are needed to remove hindrances to mission in relation to pastoral reorganisation and clergy deployment, to streamline processes and to tackle redundant paperwork. The recommendations take account of a widespread consultation process.
 19. If all the above has to be done within the confines of current funding there will be a long period before its impact can be real, not least given the need to support dioceses through the transition from the present way in which national funds are distributed. We are, therefore, grateful to the Church Commissioners for being willing to produce a report that opens up the issues around whether, for a period, they might be prepared to modify the way in which they currently seek to ensure inter-generational equity when determining what level of funding to make available from their permanent endowment.
 20. These four Task Group reports, the report on discipleship and the document from the Commissioners cover a wide range of issues, some of them complex. We are grateful to the Business Committee for being willing to make significant time available in February for engagement with them. It is particularly welcome that as well as debates there will be the opportunity for questions and discussion in groups.
 21. The decision making processes and timescales vary as between each of the reports and this is reflected in the texts of the motions before the Synod. They have been prepared in the light of the supportive discussions at the Archbishops' Council, the House of Bishops and the Board of Governors of the Church Commissioners.
 22. At this stage the motions focus primarily on vision, principles and next steps. Further development is still needed on some of the proposals and consultation required on many of the detailed outworkings before the relevant bodies, which on matters involving legislation includes the Synod itself, can reach conclusions. We hope, therefore, that Synod members might be prepared to resist the temptation to overload the motions with a large number of amendments on points of detail.
 23. In a few months' time the life of this General Synod will come to an end and fresh elections will take place in readiness for the first meeting of the new Synod in November. This is, therefore, a good moment for taking stock of the challenges and opportunities facing us. We believe that these reports, to be discussed in February, provide a basis for developing and delivering a major programme of renewal and reform within the Church of England as a matter of urgency.

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or conceive, by the power which is at work among us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations for ever and ever. Amen.”

✠Justin Cantuar: ✠Sentamu Eboracensis January 2015

Appendix B: A Vision And Narrative For Renewal And Reform (GS2038)

1. Renewal and Reform is a body of work which seeks to provide a narrative of hope to the Church in the 21st century. It builds on the 3 goals articulated and embraced by General Synod in 2010 to:
 - Contribute as the national church to the common good
 - Facilitate the growth of the church in numbers and depth of discipleship
 - Re-imagine the church's ministry

A plentiful harvest

2. Renewal and Reform is rooted in an understanding of Luke 10:2:

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.

3. God has called us afresh in our generation to be salt and light, to love our neighbours as ourselves, to have compassion on a lost and bewildered generation. We live in a time of turmoil and nothing is to be gained by denying uncomfortable truths. But God is faithful and therefore ours is also a time of hope. Christ calls us to pray in hope that the Lord of the harvest will send labourers into his harvest field.
4. The Bible tells of the surprising work of God in calling the most unexpected people. As the church now seeks to nurture new generations of leaders we too will need to look in unexpected places. We may need to focus on the fringes where people are finding faith, meeting Jesus and committing themselves to the work of the Kingdom. And we will need to go beyond the fringes to reach out and listen carefully to those who have not even thought of Jesus, confident that as we plant and water seeds God will give the growth.
5. Renewal and Reform offers a message of hope through changed lives and transformed communities as people of faith and people finding faith also discover their vocation to love God and serve others. This loving service will find voice and expression in myriad ways but will be underpinned by justice, mercy and a humble walk with God.

A hopeful future

6. By building on, challenging and supplementing the excellent work that is already taking place across the parishes, dioceses and in the National Church Institutions it is hoped that Renewal and Reform will help enable the church to move to a place where:

- Followers of Jesus are faithful witnesses to the transforming love of God in word and action
- Churches are equipped to make and sustain disciples across all generations
- Churches, chaplaincies and fresh expressions are able to have the ministry and leadership they need

- Dioceses have senior leadership which is more representative and better equipped for God's mission
- The whole church can confidently communicate our faith in a digital age
- The whole church is focussing greater energy on our participation in God's mission

7. And through all of this that more and more people may come to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

A realistic assessment

8. As God is faithful there is nothing to fear. And so Renewal and Reform does not seek to duck the challenges and realities facing the church; we know they are serious and deep-rooted. They include:

- A significant and continuing decline in and ageing of church attendance
- A significant decline in the number of stipendiary clergy, which is due to accelerate in the next ten years
- The unsustainability of certain patterns of ministry
- The lack of capacity in at least some dioceses to envision, develop and implement strategies for a more hopeful future
- The lack of leadership capacity in some places to respond effectively to current and future challenges
- The legal and cultural constraints and the institutional inertias that impede necessary change

9. But we benefit from a common understanding that each of the above offers significant opportunities. Renewal and Reform will seek to enable and facilitate confident and hopeful engagement with these and other challenges, nurturing the good and re-imagining the unsustainable.

A growing church

10. One of the clear and intended outcomes of this work is to reverse the decline of the Church of England so that we become a growing church, in every region and for every generation; a church open to and for everyone in England, building up the Body of Christ and working for the common good; a confident Church, equipping new generations of leaders, ordained and lay, for ministry and mission; a serving church where all God's people live out their vocation to serve and to witness.
11. That is our aim. Renewal and Reform is not based on a prescription of what every church should be, nor does it represent a single Church of England strategy or describe the whole of the Church of England's work. We need prayerfully to build on our rich inheritance: the daily and weekly rhythms of prayer, worship and proclamation; the thousands of hours of spoken and unspoken service in and to the community; the touching of lives at profound points through weddings, funerals and baptisms and sector ministries; the place for the committed and the enquirer, for people of very loud and very quiet faith; the planned and the random encounters; the evangelistic voice, proclaiming the love of Jesus in and to this generation; the prophetic voice, the continued call for justice and mercy; the assumption – and reality – that the church is still there when nobody else is willing to help.

12. Renewal and Reform seeks humbly and prayerfully to build on this inheritance to:

- Grow disciples in every place who are committed to conforming their own lives to the pattern of Christ and confident in sharing their faith with others and making Christ known
- Call more clergy and lay leaders into a wider variety of ministries
- Re-direct money to where it is most needed and makes the most difference
- Foster a range of creative and imaginative mission projects which both strengthen our inheritance and open up new possibilities
- Simplify rules and procedures to support and enable rather than inhibit
- Give renewed voice and hope to the people of God and the communities they serve

William Nye Secretary General

June 2016

A Lutheran Prayer for Courage

*Lord God,
you have called your servants
to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden,
through perils unknown.
Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go,
but only that your hand is leading us
and your love supporting us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

Appendix C: Ten Marks Of A Diocese Committed To Developing Disciples

Excerpt from GS1977:

In a diocese committed to developing disciples

1. ...a lifelong journey of discipleship and growth in Christian maturity is supported and modelled by all.

The diocese offers opportunities for nurturing faith, prayer and discipleship across all generations, so that all Christians continually grow as followers of Jesus in their understanding and their actions.

2. ...the importance of discipleship in daily life is affirmed.

Events, publications and statements at all levels of diocesan activity highlight and support the role of Christians living out their faith as they seek to build the Kingdom of God in the wider community, workplace and home.

3. ...gatherings for worship celebrate the discipleship of all the baptised.

The discipleship of the whole people of God is celebrated in the liturgy by word and symbol in the worship of congregations and on diocesan occasions such as the induction of ministers into parishes.

4.disciples are equipped to help others to become followers of Jesus.

The diocese offers deliberate planning and resourcing to enable congregations and individuals in their witness to Christ, and develops support networks with those involved in ministries such as lay evangelists or lay pioneers.

5. diocesan work on vocations is based on the principle that all the baptised are called into God's service.

Vocations advisers strategically promote opportunities to work with all Christians to discern and develop their calling and ministry in both the world and the church.

6. ...good practice in facilitating learning and formation is developed.

Laity, clergy and parishes are regularly resourced and equipped with high levels of expertise in using facilitation skills, learning methodologies and approaches to catechesis and formation.

7. ...gifts of leadership are recognised and developed among all the baptised.

A share in spiritual leadership, governance and witness in the wider community is affirmed by lay and ordained alike, and such affirmation is embedded in diocesan processes (e.g. Articles of Enquiry, Mission Action Plans and Ministry Development Review).

8. ...innovation and experiment are encouraged in mission, ministry and discipleship.

The diocese promotes and affirms new developments in forms of church life, in which disciples lay and ordained alike grow as they are released into new areas of active service and ministry.

9. ...specific diocesan policies and plans promote discipleship development

As an integral part of diocesan strategy there are current theologically rooted plans, projects and programmes in place to encourage and resource discipleship development.

10. ...diocesan resources are committed to the development of the whole people of God.

Resources of staff and money and time are allocated, and their effectiveness in enabling discipleship development of all regularly reviewed and assessed.

Final version of the Ten Marks: produced by Education Division, Ministry Division and MPA following wider consultation with diocesan networks.

December 19 2014.

Appendix D: *Excerpt From* - GS Misc 1054: Making New Disciples

46. In the meantime, we set out below our initial recommendations for the key areas where national work should be developed:

- a) Communicating the theological imperative for making new disciples;
- b) Leading and encouraging prayer for spiritual and numerical growth;
- c) Ensuring that the processes for selecting, training and deploying ministers fit with the goal of making new disciples;
- d) Research and listening to practitioners on the ground, leading to more effective communication of good practice in making new disciples;
- e) Developing mission experimentation across the whole Church (e.g. pushing forward the fresh expressions strategy);
- f) Developing the use of communications (e.g. social media) as a mission tool to reach beyond geographically-based mission work;
- g) Creating new resources to teach the faith through small groups (adult catechesis) and to equip people to advance the arguments for faith (apologetics);
and
- h) Training and equipping dioceses and parishes in the principles of making new disciples and Mission Action Planning.

Appendix E: Local Church Resourcing - Ten Questions For Local Churches

Excerpt from GS2015:

1. The Task Group is committed to provoking, stimulating and enabling every local church to renew their commitment to evangelism which is authentic and fruitful in each particular context. Rather than being directive the intention is, sometime in this year, to invite each PCC to consider a series of questions which can open up discussion leading to action in evangelism. Each question will have further links to resources that can enable conversations and planning.
2. At present the ten questions we are intending to ask are these:
 - What is Good News about Jesus Christ for us?
 - What are we already doing to engage those outside of the church with the Christian faith?
 - What holds us back from sharing our faith?
 - How do people outside of this local church perceive us?
 - In terms of ministry priorities, where should we as a local church put our energies?
 - In what ways can we engage in prayer for our friends, neighbours, family etc. to come to faith in Jesus?
 - What are the frameworks we could use to help us plan for evangelism?
 - What kind of things could we do to enable those without faith to come to faith in Jesus?
 - How can we help every member of this church understand and see themselves as a witness?
 - What do we do when people become Christians?
3. Synod is invited to consider these questions and to enrich and improve them.

The Revd Canon Chris Russell (on behalf of the Task Group) Archbishop of Canterbury's Advisor for Evangelism & Witness.